

BOB
QUESTED'S
TROOP

—
CAPT.
HARCOURT

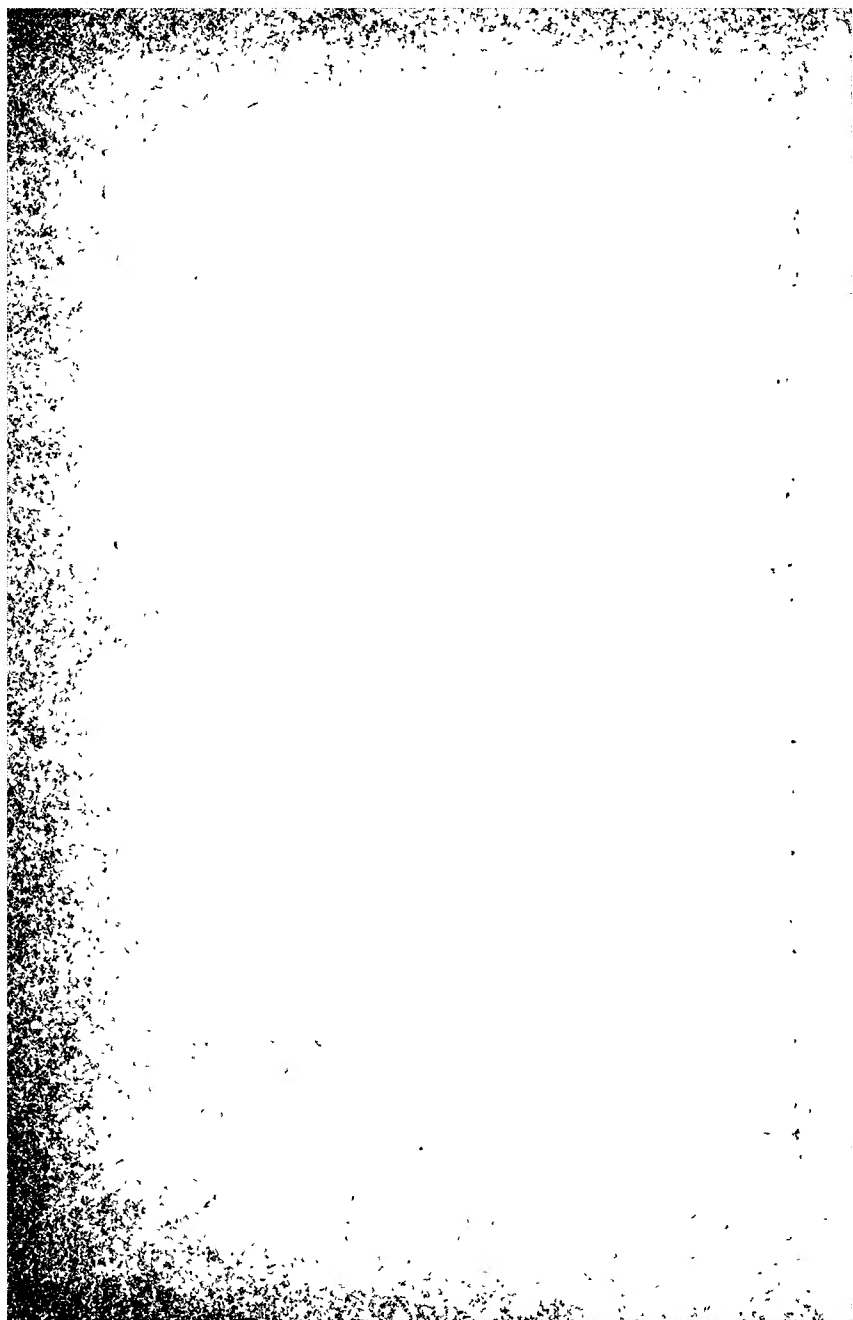


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BOB
QUESTED'S
TROOP



Not in Pel but see Pic 2436





HIS HEAD SANK AND THE LINE CUT CRUELLY ACROSS HIS CHEST.
B.Q.T. (See page 120)

BOB QUESTED'S TROOP

A TALE OF PRAIRIE SCOUTS

BY

CAPTAIN HARCOURT

(pseud. Ada B. TEETGEN)



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Bob Quested's Troop

CHAPTER I.

OVER THE TOP.

FRENSHAM wasn't a great "whale of a place," like some of them, but just a plain-sailing school for the sons of plain-sailing people. You didn't "go on" to the public schools from there, or to the 'varsities. You went on straight to life and the heat and strife and struggle of it. It called itself a "commercial college."

The masters were good stuff, every one of them, but the Head outclassed the lot.

Scoutmaster Paine ran him pretty close for popularity, especially after the way he handled Ackroyd minor for tacking a haddock skin under the refectory table—that was

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great! and Tommy Flanders of the Lower School, who swallowed a box of matches and ran away to sea for fear they'd all go off inside at once.

But Captain Moore had collared the V.C. at Delville Wood, in 1916, and the Eddystone was not more firmly rooted on its rock than he in the estimation of the Fifth.

So that when he sent for Bob Quested one spring morning, just before school was over, the latter obeyed the summons with alacrity. It had to do, he hoped mightily, with his recent application to join the new Cadet Corps forming among the senior boys, with that gorgeous old dug-out, Sergt.-Major Banks for musketry instructor. Old Banks was satisfied with their drill; they could go on straight, he said, in khaki, to bayonet practice and field tactics. Old Banks was hot stuff! He'd had some sort of a quartermaster's job during the war, and out of the "perques and pickin's," had bought a "book" for himself, and drove a gruelling trade now as an insurance agent.

Captain Moore looked to him to do big things with the cadets. Quested went

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along to the Head's study revolving bigger ones still.

Nothing of this, however, was in the wind when, knocking, he turned the handle of the door and entered.

Mrs. Moore was there, an unprecedented thing! She was tall, and rather lovely, heroine—as far as the captain was concerned—of a battlefield romance which invested her for the Frensham fellows with a glamour peculiarly felt in the knees, affecting the tongue, and making people even like Laurie Ray (captain of the eleven), go brick-red all over when she spoke to them.

It was she who came to Qusted, swiftly, gently, and took his fist in both her gentle palms. The Head stuck somewhere else, with a sheaf of papers in his hand, but before she had done speaking, he was by her side.

"Bob, dear," she said, "this isn't a school affair. I wanted to see you myself. Do you remember me telling a tale once, of a boy on sentry-go at the Highborough Barrack gate, when I was nursing there—how someone shouted across the square that his brother had been killed in France, and he fell, with the shock of it, upon his own bayonet? And

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how, the moment he got out of hospital, he went straight to the colonel to ask to be put upon the next draft for the front ? ”

Bob remembered. Yes. What then ? Something seemed to deal him a blow upon the heart.

“ There’s news for you, my boy,” he said ; “ can you stand up to it like a man ? News from the battlefield of life, and a call for you to the trenches.”

The lad’s face blanched and set hard. His instinct was to stand to attention. You can keep a stiff upper lip with eyes right and thumbs to the seam of your trousers, when a woman, with quivering sympathy in her face, and the gentlest touch of it in the hands she lays on you—somewhere, tells you that the dad is gone. Gone suddenly ; drowned off the Brisons Rock, at five yesterday afternoon, and your mother wants you home, with her, at once.

Bob bit his lips ; dropped his face ; the hot tears welled.

“ He died,” the captain said, “ like the hero he always was. I have the telegram, repeated, which the Commissioners of British Lights sent to Mrs. Quested last night. And

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letters for you, Bob, by the mid-day post, from her, and from them ; but your mother wanted us to break the news. Perhaps you'd like to be alone a bit, and read them, but you haven't much time—— ”

“ Dear,” his wife put in solicitously, “ just tell Bob how it happened. He hasn't any time if you mean to catch the one-fifteen. Mr. Paine wants to run you to the station in his car, and has already gone to fetch it. I'll just get Ted, and one or two of them—they couldn't bear to let him go without a word.”

She squeezed Bob's hand and went away. The boy turned and went to the window, looking out with eyes that saw nothing of the miniature glory of the garden ; and the Head, in another moment, joined him there.

“ Your father was Landing Master, wasn't he ? They'd got the pram-boat full of stones for the last ring before the parapet, but the weather was none too good. A detail of the party, or the seamen with them, were endeavouring to do something—make fast a hawser, I believe, to the ring in the top of the floating buoy of the moorings, when something complicated happened ; the buoy vaulted

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with such force that it upset the boat and shot everyone into the water. The tender wasn't far off, and there was plenty of floating stuff about, so that your father might have been saved, like the rest, but that he went to the assistance of a young artificer called Scott, who had been struck on the head, and appeared to be insensible. Both were carried away by the tremendous strength of the current and drowned. The bodies have not yet been found."

The Head's voice ceased. Bob struggled hard, but in the ensuing silence an immense sob tore his breast.

Dad—dad drowned! And he was to have joined him on that savage northern coast in August, and seen him lay the last stones of the lighthouse! What about his mother? Bob's thought went instantly to her.

"She's terribly cut up, of course," the Head returned, "but she'll have you with her, Bob, before the day is out. You can see the wires for yourself, and send an answer straight away.

"We're catching the one-fifteen up to town and I'll pack you off from King's Cross by the three-fifteen."

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"It's good of you, sir, to come," Bob said, "but there's no necessity."

"No ; not in the ordinary way, of course ; but your mother wants me to see your father's business man in London. That's what I meant, my boy, when I said your call had come to the front. You won't be returning to Frensham ; I rather think it will be up to you to keep the home fires burning. We must discuss it in the train."

The tone of this, funkng nothing, but putting it just right, just where it ought to come, helped the boy through these last minutes, when his pals manœuvred at the door for just a word, or a wringing of his hand ; when a sympathy that had no chance to show except by helpfulness and expedition dwelt in every servant's face ; when the masters came about him in the car, and Mrs. Moore stood on the steps. The Head jumped in and clapped the door to sharply. Ted at the crank for Mr. Paine, did sudden and volcanic things with unnecessary energy, and next moment the little runabout was speeding down the driveway to the gates. Dear old Ted ! He looked just like a kid, awfully afraid of blubbing.

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Bob sent him back a message by the scout-master. He'd have the Eagles now, of course. Oh, and to all the chaps. Sorry not to have had a chance to say good-bye. P'raps some of them would write——

He was glad, though, when the train drew out ; glad to find an empty carriage ; glad to have the window to stare out of fixedly, trying to choke down a mist of tears. It was ghastly this : dad drowned, good-bye to Frensham and good-bye to Ted—all in the space of one brief hour !

The Head, good man, had the sense to let him be. He sat in the opposite corner, not reading, but just waiting, one hand clipped in characteristic fashion under the crossing of his knees.

When, later, the boy turned his head and showed himself in hand, the captain moved and came across the carriage.

"See here, Quested," he began, and struck the right note with the familiar surname ; "I want you to feel through this that I care tremendously, and all, about it. I knew your father, and can estimate his loss, not only to your mother and yourself, but to the lighthouse service.

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"The Commissioners have some fine things to say of him ; but I rather fear he had not been with the Board long enough to get a pension. Your mother will be provided for very, very slenderly. You, my boy, will have to strike out for yourself. It's just possible the Commissioners may do something—but in these days of economy and retrenchment, I warn you not to expect much. No one wants to buck you up more than I, rely upon it, and you may look to-morrow for word of what seems feasible. In a day or so you will know better how you stand, and we'll have a great confabulation."

Bob thanked him ; it was rather overwhelming coming face to face with life and responsibility like this. He wouldn't have cared if his mother had been thrown completely on his hands. Something in the boy rose to meet the trumpet call, and a confidence of high purpose wrapped her round with his young chivalry. He had hoped, at sixteen, for two more years at Frensham, but even as it was, he ought to be good, for earning purposes, bang off. What did Mr. Moore think, now, of that long-cherished scheme of his, to train for deep-sea diving ? Whatever

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he did, it must be something active—something that took him not to desks and counting houses, but to wharves, yards, shops, to busy places where men toiled and iron rang; or to wide spaces like the sea, the bush, the prairies, the veldt, where what book learning that you had, that is where your *head* might save your heels and serve your purpose every time.

"You'd make a tip-top engineer," the captain told him, "given a better grasp of maths.; but there's not so very much for your father's son in diving. You're a bit young for the air, Quested, otherwise I should suggest that Service. As it is—clear out!"

"You mean, sir, the colonies?"

"What I mean is the prairie. The wheatlands of the West. No emigration flapdoodle, and all that, but getting down to tacks. Gruelling work, my boy, a climate that puts you through it, every mortal thing bang up against you, but, given youth and strength and purpose, and an average of luck, the finest in the world!"

It was rather a gorgeous notion. Bob, with his head full of Wister's Gentle Virginian,

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of Bindloss, Cullum, Bashford, and the rest, suddenly saw himself in leathern chaps loping over the limitless levels of the grasslands, wild peppermint in the sunny air, looking for the elysian "location" which was to be his for the driving of the corner stakes.

The conversation brisked up over this. Captain Moore knew all about the prairie; he had put in three or four seasons on a cattle ranch in the foothills of the Rockies, in Alberta, and spent a year wheat "mining" north of the Vermilion. That was long before the war; but if it had not been for a miscellaneous collection of shrapnel that still lodged about a hip, and for Frensham, the Head would have gone West again when the army chucked him out.

"I tell you what," he said, "I'll have a look in at the High Commissioner's—among other jobs—and write you something definite to put before your mother along with the rest of the business to-night, or in good time to-morrow. Meantime, turn it over in your mind, Quested, and devote yourself to her."

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CHAPTER II.

HALF ACROSS THE WORLD.

Bob left London in the afternoon by a fairly-late train, so that it was eleven o'clock at night before he got in to Castleton, and saw the lonely little figure of his widowed mother waiting for him behind the barrier.

He swung his bag from the rack, clapped his cap on the back of his head and had the door open, clinging to the footboard, long before that calculated second when it would be safe to jump and run. A porter shouted something at him, but a fat lot he cared for that ; next minute he had her in his arms.

* * * * *

In the course of the next few days, his ideas crystallised out pretty clearly.

It was a black time, in a way. Relations

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turned up and got inoffensively but inevitably in the road, especially since no sad culmination like a funeral might suggest to them, afterwards, to go. And they one and all shook their heads over Bob's decision to try his fortune—and his mother's fortune—in the West. It was breaking up the home, they said, although No. 17, Alexandra Walk must be broken up, in any case ; it was dragging a poor widow half-across the world on something of a wild-goose chase, although Bob hadn't the slightest intention of doing any such thing.

His plan, a plan heartily seconded by Captain Moore, was to go out on his own, knock about a bit, learn the ropes, find a footing in the country, and send for his mother in a twelvemonth's time, when he might see his way to put in for a quarter section of his own in a farming district, and run up the necessary "buildings" on it to prove that homesteading duties were intended.

"I send," the Head had written, "half-a-dozen Western journals for you to run your eye down the columns of the farmers' ads. Every one of them are clamouring for 'hired'

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help. That just means skilled or unskilled labour, as the case may be, and you couldn't go far wrong in plumping for any one of them. Don't choose your job out West, but tackle any work that offers. You'll be judged by what you can do, and not by what you are. Hire help means, as a rule, the "chores," but you'll do a good deal better than that. You are a hefty fellow, Qusted, and not in bad training, either, although 'clearing, breaking,' *i.e.*, uprooting tree stumps with a chain and team of oxen, where the plough is to be driven, is no child's play at best. In a few weeks' time you ought to be worth a decent wage to anyone. My advice to you is: Go West, young man; there's work to be had at every stopping place 'twixt Winnipeg and the Rockies, if you've got the grit to take and stick it. I'll send you a few likely introductions, but you won't need them, so don't necessarily go out of your way to make use of a single one."

There was a great deal more than this, of course; Captain Moore had not been letting the grass grow under his feet on Bob's behalf in London, but the foregoing paragraph summed up the gist of his advice. The

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lighthouse people removed the only stumbling block in Bob's way. They volunteered his passage money out, and to pay for his mother's transportation from door to door when the son of their late employée should be ready to receive her in his Canadian home. Meanwhile, if she cared for the position, she could draw thirty shillings a week as linen-room mistress at a certain well-known seaman's orphanage.

As for Scoutmaster Paine at Frensham, and Ted Hunter—priceless old pal!—they wrote that the troop intended to put up Bob's outfit. The captain advised the purchase of woollen things, like socks and that, in England, and of a well-thought-out collection of handy tools; otherwise Bob had best tuck his wad into his belt and lay it out in Winnipeg on a slicker, overalls, mitts, snow-boots, and a sheepskin coat.

The high excitement of it kept Bob going, and his mother let slip no word of what the parting must inevitably mean to her. They were hectic, strenuous days in Alexandra Walk before the never-to-be-forgotten Tuesday when he sailed.

He went from Liverpool with a party of

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four hundred emigrants, in the steerage of the *Western Empress*, a magnificent vessel of 20,000 tons.

She lay out in mid-stream, waiting on the tide, that pearly summer morning, when the tender plied backwards and forwards 'twixt the liner and the landing stage conveying out to her load after load of hopeful exiles.

"All for the shore, get aboard!"

Wisps of smoke already trailed from her funnels, showing steam was getting up; the derricks for'ard were triced high and the enormous hatches closed, for they had finished stowing cargo overnight, and the luggage by now had all come aboard. Great jets of water gouted from her sides; the rail towered over the crowded tender, and the dazzling superstructure of white cut against the haze of the Mersey River sky. The ship swarmed with people; every now and again her siren gave a deafening roar.

Bob hung over the rail, breast pressed upon it as the ship's company piled itself in a throng to see the tender go. There were cries backwards and forwards, heartening, cheerful cries, the shouting of last messages, people trying to smile and show a brave face,

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despite their tears, a frantic fluttering of handkerchiefs, here and there a cheer, a clinging of receding looks, then the tender, kicking up a wide semi-circle of foam, like torn lace upon the dirty flood, stood away under her belching funnel for the distant stage.

And that was the last Bob saw of her—his mother—for many an adventurous day.

The wind sang about the boy's bare head, and the sun glowed warm on a brass casing under his hand. He left the rail at last, when Liverpool was but a smudge in the distance, and walked forward, past the donkey engine and the hatches, to where he could feel the tremor strongest, and, leaning over-side again, watch her towering cutwater cleaving the strong and flowing tide. A wave, green as bottle glass sprang from it, a gentle hiss seethed along the vessel's side.

The *Western Empress* was fairly off upon her voyage, and Bob Quested had started life upon his own.

Two rather exciting things happened on the voyage.

There were a pair of quite good fellows in the cabin with Bob, one an ex-scoutmaster of a London troop, called Ames, and the other

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an ex-quartermaster-sergeant, just quit of the Army at the end of his career, after two years on the Rhine.

The second morning out, they lay off Belfast for an hour, taking on her Irish contingent.

And that night they had their first adventure. Everyone, with a few valiant exceptions, was seasick, for it blew something like a gale.

Bob lay in his bunk (bobbish, personally, as you like, as became a seaman's son), but trying to count the number of things the *Empress* was doing all at once, to which every muscle in his body had somehow to respond. She pitched and tossed, head on to the seas; she rolled as the mountains, broadside on, swept past and flew away to leeward under her; she corkscrewed up and down the hollows; she forged fearlessly ahead. Bob thought of the man in the crow's nest in the darkness and the murk; of the officer on the bridge—responsible for a thousand lives, the cargo and the leviathan herself.

He thought of the stokers trying to keep their feet and feeding the scorching, belching furnace below.

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Quartermaster-Sergeant Spenslaugh wished devoutly he was back on the Rhine, and the two other chaps in 63 were equally down and out. The cabin seemed to creak and strain and hum in all its timbers. Suddenly there came a terrific shock. Dunnage flew about; Spenslaugh rolled on to the floor; cries and screams of terror were heard all along the alleyway outside.

Bob sprang to the deck, and staggered back against the bunks; it was all he could do to hold on. Somehow, he managed to give a hand to the sick soldier, whose head had disappeared and got jammed behind a gladstone bag under the bottom berth.

"For God's sake, boy," cried Spenslaugh, struggling up, "what's happened? Help me get my trousers on, and look sharp with the belts; we've got to give the rest a hand."

In a trice, Bob dragged them from the racks. He made short work of the limp individual in the bunk below his own, but had a struggle with the other sufferer, who only swore at him and wailed to be let go to the bottom as soon as the old hooker'd take him!

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Spenslaugh strove manfully to subdue his weakness, but Bob was out of the cabin long before he followed, racing down the corridor to find out what was up. The ship was labouring heavily. He cannoned violently into a figure in pyjamas, who turned out to be Ames.

"It's all right, Quested; come along and help to reassure the folks; the stewards' hands are more than full."

They clung to a bulkhead, swung, and raced again.

"It felt as if we'd struck a rock or something——"

"I know, floating wreckage, or another boat. But we haven't; we've just escaped running down a schooner. We should have cut her clean in two, but the helmsman put the wheel down so hard and so suddenly, she just scraped clear. It was a broadside from the sea that caught us; we'd get knocked silly every time but for the Johnny at the wheel. Some steering, what?"

All this Ames gasped and shouted as occasion served. They swung in and out the alleyways, banging on the cabin doors to let the people know that all was well—nothing

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had gone wrong—exchanging such comments on the situation as they could.

“Some steering, what!” cried Ames.

“Some fine look-out!” Bob echoed. “All right in there, you lot? No need to get the wind up. I say, Ames, who’s doing this stunt on the women’s side; we can’t.”

The young scoutmaster laughed.

“Guess,” he said, and rolled against the other. “There are some guides among them, and they’re making a night out of it, like us. Goodness knows however we are to find our way back to our own bathing-machines in this giddy old maze. Here, steward, where’ve we got to?”

Bob lurched away on some knight errantry of his own, anxious to meet the Q.M.S. with the reassuring news. It was some time, however, before he could locate his cabin, and only did it finally by the help of another chap whose face he knew, but not his name. The incipient panic in the steerage had been quickly quelled and everyone crawled somehow back to bed, Spenslaugh among the last.

Very few passengers turned up to a straggly and belated breakfast, and it looked as though Miss Tarrant, the guider among the girls,

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also had succumbed. But the steward said no ; she was taking care of the children whose mothers had gone under ; the young gentleman would find them up on deck.

It was rough still—too rough to run about and play—but the sun shone and the glorious sprays that leaped aboard over the weather bow and went streaming in the scuppers across the gleaming deck, delighted Pamela and the little crowd she had about her in a "cubby hole" rigged up for them by a friendly deck hand out of a few sail-cloths.

She hailed Ames and Quested, and set them telling stories. Bob's story got the prize :

"Once upon a time," he said—"and it's a true story, boys and girls—there were two rascally little brothers, Jack and Harry. They were going home one day and passed a house in the same street where they lived, with the kitchen door standing open. Inside, an old woman was carefully putting a huge meat pudding into an open iron pot. Then she set it on the fire to cook. Jack and Harry went home, full of this delicious vision, and waited till they thought the pudding would be done. Then they cut off upstairs, scrambled

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out of the attic windows, and crawled along the leads until they came to the roof of the old woman's house, and reached her chimney stack.

" They had a bit of rope with them and a hook on the end.

" They let this fishing line go down the chimney, grappled with it for the pudding out of the pot, and safely hauled it up. It was gloriously hot and shiny and smelt most awful good. They dug into it, you may be sure, and presently ate up the lot, leaving the empty basin on the roof so that no one should find out.

" Nothing happened for a week, and all seemed quiet. Then a bolt fell on Jack and Harry from the blue !

" Pa forgot to serve them at their Sunday dinner ! He served ma, and all the rest, and left out Jack and Harry.

" Messrs. J. and H. protested.

" ' Pa, you've forgotten us.'

" ' Dear me,' said pa, ' and so I have ! Well, I'll make up for it. You shall have an extra big plateful each.'

" This suited the rascally little brothers very well, for no boys were better trencher-

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men than they. Just as they were going to begin, fork and knife in hand, pa spoke again :

“ ‘ No, you don’t,’ he said, ‘ you don’t so much as *touch* it ! You’ll just take them two plates in your two hands, you two, and walk off down the street to Mrs. Flowers. And you go straight in and set ’em down before her and say you’re sorrier than you ever thought you’d be that you stole her pudding from the pot a week ago to-day. And then come back to me ! I’ll have my eye on you both ways.’ ”

“ Those boys,” said Bob, “ got the tanning of their lives.”

A chorus of sympathy went up. One little boy demanded to know who’d “ peached.”

The storyteller laughed.

“ That’s what I can’t say,” he added ; “ someone who’d seen them on the roof.”

There was a clamour for more tales, but Ames produced rope quoits, and set a fashion which never palled from that time on throughout the journey across the Western ocean.

Bob joined the Q.M.S. at the rail, and they hung there as the ship rolled, talking,

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until bit by bit the folks came up, and the deck began to look quite animated.

Next morning things were calm and sunny, and the two found themselves again upon the spot.

The soldier stuffed tobacco into his pipe with a contented finger.

"Quite a lot of young fellows going out on board," he remarked; "we'll have some sport, or I'm mistaken. One of 'em's a boxer—he's a flyweight champion, I believe; I heard him fixing up to take on some sparring partners—up here on the deck."

"Good biz!" exclaimed the other; "I wonder if he'd give me a try. You'll have to point him out."

"That's him, that feller in the dazzle pull-on. He's going to do a mile five times a day round this," with a wave of the pipe to indicate the deck; "seems to me he's pacing it out now."

The fellow indicated passed him presently, going with a purpose, in his running shoes. He was a well-built specimen, all spring and beef, with a hard-case looking face and extremely sleek black hair. A following of more weedy individuals helped the mild

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sensation of these promising appearances.

Girls seated about the hatches turned with interest to watch.

Bob took the boxer's measurement with no unpractised eye.

"Looks rather a doughty customer," he observed. "I wonder if I could stand a couple of rounds. I'm pretty hard myself, but none too quick with my footwork."

"Ah," said the other thoughtfully, an eye levelled across his smoke, "that's where the trainin' tells. There was a young fellow in my battalion on the Rhine, what I never have seen beat, and all on account of his footwork. Nimble! Why, a cat wasn't in it with him."

They pursued the topic for a space.

But a term was put to these ferryboat amenities by the welcome blowing of a bugle in a well-remembered phrase.

"Come to the cook-house door, boys, come to the cook-house door!" Whereat everyone loosed their moorings, sprang to their feet, and scuttled below.

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CHAPTER III.

A BOXING MATCH ON BOARD.

As everybody got friendly, talk ran among the sports in the emigrant quarters on the "form" of the various amateurs who volunteered for a round or two with the boxer champion.

The ropes were stretched round one of the hatches just forward of the donkey engine, and here Wainwright "took 'em on," turn and turn about, vastly to the entertainment of the watching crowd, and that of the saloon passengers on the upper decks. Between whiles he acted—to the uninitiated—like a lunatic, dancing backwards and forwards to no apparent tune, making lunges, uppercuts, and dealing showers of unresisted blows upon the vacant air. His opponents weren't really

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worth his while, and were slow in coming forward.

For some time, Quested and his friends, Ames and Sergeant Spenslaugh, made no move in the affair; they waited to form an estimate of their man, and held a private sitting on him later in a corner of the smoke-room.

The soldier was quick to see how interesting a real good match would prove if properly managed, and rather fancied himself in this connection. Wainwright was hard as nails, but just a trifle short in the reach. Bob was lighter, younger, but in the pink of condition, too. If he could put up any sort of a show at all, a bit of coaching might give Wainwright a man who'd last more than half-a-dozen rounds.

They rather thought they would keep matters to themselves until the issue of the challenge—if it came to that—so had a try out there and then in the deserted smoke-room.

Q.M.S. Spenslaugh had been a redoubtable boxer in his time, and still delighted to "put 'em up." He ran a complacent eye over Bob as the latter stripped off coat and

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waistcoat, threw open his shirt at the strong column of a creamy young throat, and rolled his sleeves shoulder-high. The hard fingers of the elder man tested the quality of those egg-like biceps with approval. Stewards brought some gloves and hung round, promising to keep the door, in highest expectation. Ames whipped a towel, laughing, from one of their arms, and prepared to act as second.

Bob fell into the attitude of defence and faced his man. He was a stockily-built fellow, of medium height, with the firm legs of a runner.

Round and round they went, watching for the lightning opportunity. . . . Spenslaugh, amazed, frankly, at the other's guard, and at the force and aptness of the first blow when he got it. It was like a sledge hammer, full on the left of his ribs. The youngster cut and cut again, knocked him up more than once, but went down game, with a light one over the ear, and was up again next second.

"Upon my word, boy," exclaimed the soldier, "you've got more in you than I thought. You'd be worth a trainer's while. You seem to have a rattling good idea of defence ; now let's try your attack."

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Bright colour flamed in the boy's face. This was praise indeed from a total stranger. Scoutmaster Paine in the gym. at Frensham had often said the same thing, but Bob attached greater weight to it now.

The next bout was more like solid work. He went for that lump of old mahogany all he knew, bashed him good and hard, clumped him twice on the jaw, and pummelled him to the ropes, *i.e.*, the jammed crowd near the door. Spenslaugh dropped into a chair declaring he was winded.

"Lord," he said, with a comic glance at one of the elder fellows, "they can take it out of us—these kids! Who in thunder had the shaping of you, young man?"

Then they went at it again, ding dong, to and fro, arms clenched one moment, flashing the next, feet thudding on the deck. Spenslaugh took a sharp note of Bob's footwork, but seemed to think it good enough. More or less satisfied, he wound up the third bout when he would. A well-judged uppercut and the boy went down like a log.

Ames was over him, brandishing the towel, counting, counting. My word! that was something like a bang! Bob staggered to his

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knees, head swimming, hanging; someone lugged him, laughing, by the elbow, and a stout hand rubbed his cranium at the back.

"No, you ain't out, old sport," cried one of the delighted onlookers, "but you didn't 'alf get it on the jaw that time." A deluge from a sponge, and a crowd of gleeful, appreciative faces.

He was in the ring again, ears singing, Spenslaugh somewhere in the offing.

Bob hurled himself at his opponent. All his young blood was up, warmed by the fight, but under the control of as fine a temper as Frensham ever forged. His head cleared suddenly, and steadied. He let out a hurricane of blows, and Spenslaugh doubled up, staggered, caught at some support and gave him the round.

"You're a game cock, I must admit!" he gasped, "and quite enough for me. You hulking young bully, what do you mean by knocking out a poor old dodderer who only had the Hun to practise on of late? Wouldn't some of our chaps like to see Jerry in your hands!"

"Say, Quartermaster," cried Ames, "just one more, and then we'll give the pair of you

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a boiling in the bath, and a rub down to beat the band, and sling you both to bed. And to-morrow, Wainwright'll have his work cut out for him in earnest."

But the soldier knew well enough that one punch from his straight left would settle Bob, as it had often settled all comers in the regimental ring. The try-out had more than proved the lad's capacity, and what was infinitely more, his mettle. He pulled off his gloves, chucked them to a white-faced steward,—thin and weedy, with adoration in his eyes—and grasped Bob by the hand.

"Good man," he said, "in five years' time you'd make a reputation. Now sit down and listen to what I've got to say. It'll help more than beef and muscle at the moment. And don't, after the fifth round, look so sunny. Who is it—you ought to know—says, 'Set the teeth and ope' the nostrils wide; lend the countenance a fearful aspect,' when you're just about to dot the 'other feller on the crumpet, or he won't believe you."

Bob laughed, gave in, and did as he was bid.

"The Immortal Will," he said, "some-

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where in Henry V. But the end of it's your own."

"Ah! That's possible. Now, look you here! I'll coach you for four days, engage to get up a purse for twenty-five pounds, the winner to take two-thirds, and challenge Wainwright on behalf of my nominee. Will you go into training?"

"Righto," the boy agreed, "if you really think I'm up to it, and thank you, Sergeant. Tell me what he says."

What the champion said, leaning elbows backwards on the rail, that evening, was that it would be fun to knock some of the stuffing out of a scout.

"Trot him out by all means, Quartermaster. See me whallop him with one hand, four days from now."

* * * * *

The fact that Bob went into training detracted nothing from his enjoyment of the trip, and added enormously, before the four days were up, to his popularity on board.

It turned out there were thirty-seven chaps among the emigrants who were, or had been, scouts. They rallied as one man to

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their champion, and formed a court about him, and a "terrific mob" of girls who were guides, hung upon their flank. The fun, as between the lot, waxed fast and furious all day. It always does on board ship—especially third-class—when there's some healthy influence at work which keeps people from breaking up into sets and cliques, none of which care a row of pins about the rest. Lots of girls came to join the games and things from the first-class passengers' part of the ship. They were guides and guiders of various sorts who fraternised at once with those among the emigrants. It looked as though the sports, fixed for the day before the *Empress* sighted Rimouski, would be rather a record affair, even for the Western ocean.

Every morning Bob was out on deck before sunrise, doing his sprint and paces. Twelve times he padded round before Ames carried him off for a brisk towelling and a drink. The breakfast menu was rigidly reduced and limited, but he got a stunning cup of Bovril (sent every day by a Lieut.-Col. in the saloon, who had known Captain Moore in France) after his mid-morning bout with Spenslaugh.

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They took things easy in the afternoon, and knocked off dancing in the evening sharp at ten. Bob's form improved tremendously; he had his weak points still, but his backers were confident their man was not likely to go stale.

The other chap, Wainwright, awaited the event with nonchalance and some amusement. He liked the look of Bob, with his crisp, bright hair all bleaching in the strong sea air and sun, but could not take him seriously as a boxer, for a moment. Why, the kid had only just left school, by all accounts. What could he know of professional pugilism? "Game," yes—game as you like; but no science, no experience.

The match was to be the first big event on the morning of sports day. By half-past nine the ship's band was in full blast, and there wasn't standing room left upon the forward deck. Everywhere the people swarmed, along the rails, packed on the companion ladders, and perched atop of engines.

The combatants appeared betimes, suitably got up in shorts and sweaters and grinned broadly in each other's faces as they advanced and shook self-conscious hands.

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When the colonel, as referee, announced the details of the forthcoming contest, the enthusiasm was tremendous. Every member of the liner's crew had a bet on one or other of the boxers, and every man who had a chance crowded in to see.

"He's a good lot younger than the champion," observed one greaser to another, "don't 'ardly seem as if they was well matched; 'ope 'e don't get knocked out in the second round."

No one, honestly, felt Bob could do more than keep the boxer busy for a dozen rounds. Only Pamela Tarrant saw something in his steady eyes as the two jockeyed a little for position, which gave her the moral measure of the man within, the real man with whom the other had to deal; Wainwright only saw a schoolboy bluffing a bit before a crowd.

Suddenly the boxer moved. His right shot forward with terrific force. But Bob's head simply wasn't there, and a thunderous blow over the heart jolted just one breath out of Wainwright's body. The scout had countered skilfully; cheers accorded him first point.

Wainwright looked astounded. He intended to make short work of Bob, if anybody

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thought the boy could stand up to him for long. He would have given the crowd something for its money, but only by way of magnanimity. Now, however, the kid should catch it. He went for him, a human catapult. Blows rained about Bob's body.

The lad feinted, countered as best he could. The other drove him like a ram across the ring. Bob hung over the ropes, all his world in black confusion.

They dragged him to his corner. Great snakes! His fists were butter! Spenslaugh was urging something in his ear. Ames was a whirling lunatic in towels.

He was up again, and dancing. Dancing as no cat danced upon the tiles. Backwards and forwards, here and there, always where the other failed to land. Round and round they went, always out of reach, punishing the air. The crowd roared, yelled, and egged them on. Then Wainwright changed his tactics. He ceased to gyrate, and began a series of feints and counterfeints designed to draw and baffle Bob. The boy summoned every atom that he knew. He dodged and sparred; he watched for an opening that never came. He landed futile blows, then—

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crash ; he whirled like a top and fell. . . .

There were yells to " call it off," the kid hadn't a chance ; and in a rushing, far-off storm of noise, somehow, Bob heard counting.

One . . . two . . . three . . . a hand seemed to hold down on his racing heart and brace and steady it. . . . four, the air was rushing into his lungs . . . five, his knee somehow ground the tarpaulin, and he shoved a load, heavier than Atlas's, from his neck.

The " kid " was up again at " seven," and sprawling under Spenslaugh's hands.

Everything was in a red mist still, a red mist shot with lightning. And Wainwright looming through it. . . . Bob braced his will.

" Dad ! " he ground between his teeth, and flung aside an arm like a bar of iron. His own fist shot up under it, and might have crashed upon a bulkhead. Then it was torn down by something heavy, falling, rolling like a log, senseless and inert.

He hung, himself, in mid air, lurching on his toes, the thing prone on the deck beneath his staring eyes. And again that counting, monotonous—inexorable—in a stillness ringed around with bated breath.

Æons passed. Bob heard his heart. His

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fist was surely broken. The referee had only got to six.

Seven . . . Bob swayed, reeling on his feet, and wondered if it was the ship or him.

Then, eight ! . . . nine ! and Wainwright counted out. Hands above him everywhere ; voices, faces, people swarming on the hatch, a deafening ringing in the blue above where the derricks swung against the dazzling clouds ; glorious cold water ; Spenslaugh emitting sparks, and Ames gone off his chump. Greasy faces grinning, wanting to shake hands ; sailors' faces peering into his with bearded smiles ; friendly faces aglow with hero worship.

And the funniest face of all—and him, Bob, dragged up to look at it—Wainwright, blue-and-green and groggy, but alive and grinning, propped up like a dummy in the press.

Bob got a grappling hook on what was doing and stammered the first thing that came into his head.

"It was a fluke," he said ; "I'd no idea what I was at."

"No matter, pard ; you done it. You done the Dempsey trick ! Fell an ox, any day, with that !"

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The two hands gripped, and a roar went up again, which turned to the laughter of a thousand throats as the *Empress* joined in, too. A blare went from her siren fit to rend the sky.

The boxing match was over, and the obstacle race came next.

"Room—room everybody—for the lining up," and the doctor and the purser, very busy, moved the late heroes on.

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CHAPTER IV.

SERGEANT IVAN OF THE R.C.M.P.

Two days afterwards the voyage came to an end.

The three friends from Stateroom 63 stuck together for the next bit of the trip, on the immigration cars from Montreal to Winnipeg. Then Q.M.S. Spenslaugh got a job on the line of the C.P.R., Ames went off to Red River, and Bob put himself in the hands of the people at the Employment Bureau.

There was a Mr. Fairbanks, they told him, at a place called Finlay, in Alberta, who had registered for a "hired man." This Philip Fairbanks was a weed inspector—whatever that might be—whose duties took him away a lot, and pretty far afield. He had a half-section in a country of mixed farming, and wanted more help with the stock.

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Bob, and his friend, Ames, who had not yet parted, spent the inside of ten minutes talking the "proposition" over.

If this chap Fairbanks was employed by the Ministry of Agriculture, as the Immigration people said, there must be something to him. Grit was what you wanted out West, the grit to get on. Let Bob close with the offer, anyhow, and make the thing a jumping-off place if it should prove no better purpose.

All right; Bob had a passionate love of horses (although it would be "up to him" to learn to ride), and wasn't afraid of work. He closed with the offer at twenty-five dollars a month and his keep. It was a chance to sample prairie life, and he was glad to get it.

They barged out of Winnipeg Station, the two of them, had a spifflicating feed on Main Street in a queer sort of restaurant, called a "quick lunch counter," and parted with mutual scout regard at ten that night, boarding the cars again for their respective destinations.

Bob had two days and a night yet to go rumbling on and on, and on. They had been the best part of a week threading the long Ontarian wilderness, a wild region of lakes

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and rivers, of granite hills and pine forest, but now the country changed and became illimitable, flat and featureless as the surface of a billiard table. They were crossing the Manitoban plains, and the wheatlands of Saskatchewan.

The road was good, and the engineer drove his mighty locomotive—a thing reeking of force and power—with the throttle wide. Thick smoke blew along the side of the rocking emigration cars; cinders rattled on the roofs, and showers of sparks fell along the track. Every now and again the train stopped for a few moments at a wayside halt (for the shabby little wooden towns across the prairie scarcely amounted to more than this), and with a brazen-tongued clanging of the bell upon the engine, pulled out again along that interminable ribbon of straight steel towards the foothills and the Rockies, and the far Pacific.

On the morning of the third day after leaving Winnipeg, the brakemen came down the cars intoning the name of the next station. Bob hastily bundled his belongings together in a knapsack, for at last they were nearing Finlay.

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Just on the stroke of noon the long line of cars swung across a culvert, and with the bell loudly clanging, the locomotive drew up at yet another of those toy-like little wooden "depots" which punctuated the track across the illimitable levels.

Bob clapped on his cap, swung his knapsack across his shoulders, and dropped directly from the vestibule of one of the hindmost cars to the gravel and the ties.

The station was still some hundred yards ahead. Next moment the train was on the move again, swinging into the long perspective of the prairie distance, and Bob picked his way between the metals in its wake.

Here he was at last, then, stranded alongside a collection of upturned packing-cases in the midst of nowhere! The whole of Finlay could be seen at a glance. It was nothing but a mushroom settlement beside the track, where a giant elevator on the left confronted the grey painted sheds of the depot, and the water tank upon the right. Behind these lay the "town." It consisted of a single street, one mass of heavy ruts and mud. Above these ran a rickety sidewalk of planks fronting the crude frame houses, destitute of

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paint or adornment, every one of which seemed to be a store of some kind, judging by the gigantic letterings upon the false pediments which towered above the cedar-shingled roofs.

Bob had seen scores of such villages in the course of the last few days. He liked the look of them as one likes the drop scene in a theatre—for the prairie lay beyond.

As he gained the stumpy platform at the depot, a stout man in an official cap and shirt-sleeves who had just been examining a consignment of brightly-painted farm implements and machinery, looked up and consulted a sheaf of papers in his hand.

"Say, young feller," he observed, addressing Bob, "is your name Quested—just out from the Old Country?"

"That's right," returned the boy; "I've been sent along from Winnipeg to a Mr. Fairbanks here. They said they'd notify him for me."

"Why, yes; he's right here in town this morning. He allowed you'd come in on the mid-day train."

The agent took Bob by the elbow and pointed to a weather-beaten frame building,

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like an enormous wooden box, standing on the farther side of a desolate morass of ruts and mud.

"See that red-painted house—that's the hotel, and the Pool Room's next to it. Go straight over there. I was to say you'd find him one place or the other."

Bob thanked him, took a fresh hunch at his knapsack and set off as directed. It was a glorious spring day when a smiling sun had taken the last vestiges of frost out of the rich, black prairie soil. Here and there a drift of crumbling snow might still lie beneath a wood pile or a shadowed wall, but for the rest, the place was like a quagmire.

Two or three men lounging on the sidewalk watched the boy's progress with amusement. A dozen or so thin-wheeled rigs covered with mud, were lined up before the hotel, and here and there a saddle horse was also hitched, among them, to the tying rails in front.

A thick-set fellow in a suit of ready-made store clothes leaned against the lintel of the door, a cigarette between his lips, and raised a laugh among the others as Bob came up and asked if Mr. Fairbanks was anywhere about.

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"Mornin', Mr. Percy," he returned, using the most opprobrious nickname a Canadian can clap upon a newcomer from England, "seems you're just blown in on time, ready for the breakin'," and here they laughed again. "Yep, you'll find him right inside."

Bob took no notice of a pleasantry that escaped him. He pressed past the others and found himself in a narrow passage between the bar and a roughly-laid-out dining room.

In the former—a barrack-like place, with nothing except cigar ends, dirt, burnt matches and spittoons upon the floor—a bar-tender was wiping glasses, and a group of those idlers who, even in Western Canada, seem to spend their lives lounging about hotels, had drawn up round the stove. As many of them as could find room had put their feet up on it, for it had not been lighted yet, nor black-leaded for many a long day.

In the other room—the dining room—two long tables were set out for a meal, and a slatternly-looking woman was busy shovelling huge plates of meat before the few diners here and there, who, with knife and fork up-raised, awaited them and fell upon them. Most of these looked like drummers—the

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commercial travellers of the West—or farmers, in well-worn blue jean, patched about the elbows. There seemed to be little conversation going on : everyone was preoccupied and busy. As Bob came in, however, and looked round, dumping his haversack, a man got up from a seat at the table near the window, and moved towards him.

" I believe it's me you're looking for," he said, " I'm Fairbanks. Come along and set you down and eat. You're Quested, ain't you—up from Winnipeg? Glad to see you. Shake ! "

Bob did so, pleased with the look of him, and the cordial hardness of his hand.

" The station agent sent me over," he observed, screwing his legs somehow into place beneath that narrow board, " and jolly glad I am to get here after six days on the cars."

" Some trip, eh ? " said the other, signing to the girl for a plate for his companion ; " how long since you sailed ? "

" Fourteen days," the boy returned, and found himself launched upon the story. Fairbanks was a decent sort, cordial and friendly, glad to have him talk. Bob liked his way and

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face. The latter was lean and sharp, and tanned, with eyes as blue and steady as a sailor's, trained to infinite and empty spaces. He had an extraordinary mop of hair brushed straight back from the forehead in a mass of sherry-coloured ripples which sank in tone to a dull dark brown where it was close-cropped round the ears, and red, clean-shaven neck.

"Say," he laughed, running an appraising glance in turn over his new hired man, "you ain't one of those high falutin' college-dudes, I hope——"

This was because of Frensham.

"Rather not," said Bob, wondering how he'd come to mention it, "I'd be sorry for you to think I didn't look like work."

"Oh—shucks!" Fairbanks retorted, "if you've been in the scouts you ought to make good at doin' chores about a farm, even if you've got all the rest to learn. How old are you—sixteen? I should have given a hefty guy like you a good couple of years more."

Bob was pleased. It was something to make a decent impression on this sort of employer. Fairbanks himself was young—twenty-five or thereabouts. He told the boy

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he owned a quarter-section, a hundred-and-sixty acres on the edge of the governmental survey, some fourteen miles north of the town. It was wheat growing he went in for, but had a tidy lot of cattle ranging his pasture.

"Talk about the immigration cars," he said, "you should do that trip in a caboose with a cattle crew, in charge of six or seven hundred head, and take 'em over the Atlantic between decks. That's goin' some, I tell you."

"Glory!" cried young Quested, "how do you get on to a job like that? I only wish I'd known."

"Why, there's shippers all through the foothill country send a bunch down east in the fall, or over across to Birkenhead. I know Liverpool as well as I know my ranch. Tell a bit more about Wembley and things at home in England; I like to hear the English twang. Tell about the scouts; there's lots of scouts in Canada, but not up this way. I ain't got acquainted with 'em yet myself."

Bob laughed at the idea of his speaking with a twang to prairie ears, and got at the bottom of that gibe about the English "Percy." It had to do with drawl and swank, remittances

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from home, fanaticism about "bawths," and a strong dislike to spin the working day into twenty-five hours as they had to do out West between the break-up in the spring and the freeze-up in the autumn.

This Phil Fairbanks was just the sort of fellow he could cotton to, so that he got a bit of a jolt presently when the farmer fell singularly silent and pushed his litter of plates aside, the better to consider. He beckoned the girl for a "whack of pie" for Bob, thrust a thumb into the armhole of his jeans and enquired with some change of manner what had made the other think of coming West.

"You ain't old enough," he said, "to take up land, just yet; "got to be eighteen before you can file on."

"I know," Bob said, "but what's to prevent me getting ready? That's the whole idea. I've everything to learn—even how to ride."

The farmer regarded him without speaking, and stuck a toothpick in the gold gleam of his teeth.

"How'd you like it, Qusted, if I was to turn you down?" he asked at length.

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"Not a bit," Bob interjected; "you've hired me, and here I am. What's the matter with me?"

For reply, Fairbanks drove his chair back over the boarded floor, got up, and strode off to the far end of the table. He leaned an arm upon it, deep in conversation with a man there whom Bob had not observed hitherto. Now he did so, noting a soldierly-looking figure in the neat but bespattered brown patrol uniform, and blue breeches with a yellow stripe of the famous Royal North-West Mounted Police. The trooper's dented stetson hung upon a nail on the wall. He had his eye, as the other talked, on Bob, and presently the two men returned together.

"Say, Quested," Fairbanks announced, "this is Sergeant Ivan, of the R.N.W.M.P., or rather, the Canadian M.P. now. Ever heard of them?"

"I should think I have," the boy cried, flushing slightly, "and I'm jolly proud to meet one." His hand shot instinctively to the salute, and the newcomer made acknowledgment. He swung a chair round, one hand on the back, and dropped into it like one slightly wearied with the saddle. He

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had ridden in twenty miles that morning.

"Pleased to meet you, Quested," he observed, "Mr. Fairbanks has been telling me about you. Seems a pity he don't seem to have much use for you now you've got here, don't it?"

The boy went red again, but this time with chagrin and surprise. "What's that?" he demanded, "I don't understand," and turned troubled eyes upon the farmer.

"That's just about it, Quested; you ain't the feller I've been looking for—not by a long chalk," and Fairbanks tilted up his chair, to swing on one of its hind legs, like a man who had somehow to bluff out rather a mean change of front.

"I'm a tenderfoot, I know," Bob protested, vainly struggling to account for this, "but," with an appeal to the sergeant, "I haven't pretended not to be. I came to him on a distinct understanding, and the least he could do would be to give me some sort of a trial."

"Perhaps he has already," returned the soldier, "and come to the conclusion you won't do." He set a square hand athwart his solid thigh and made no bones about the

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odd announcement. Both men were as grave as owls.

Fairbanks worked his jaw on a substantial lump of chewing gum, and nodded.

"That's just about it, Ivan; he won't do for me."

Bob looked in dismay from one man to the other.

"But it isn't playing fair," he cried, "and it's landing me in something of a hole. What's the matter with me? How've I put your back up, anyway?"

Then the pair of them broke down and laughed.

"Sit you there," the elder said, pulling him to a chair, "and give an ear to me. Didn't you say you've only just quit schoolin'? Didn't you say you was in the scouts?"

"Why, yes," Bob owned, "I did. What of it?"

"Just this and all. Phil Fairbanks ain't the man to have a feller like you wastin' your time around his place doin' chores; tain't good enough, my boy, and I agree with him."

The late leader of the Golden Eagles grinned.

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"You've pulled my leg, Mr. Fairbanks, but I won't bear a grudge; I'd like to work for you, and begin, anyhow, on 'chores.'"

"Good lad," the sergeant said, and the hard hand clapped him on the knee, "but see here, how'd you like to work for me, instead?"

Bob stared. Work with the famous prairie police—work with a body of men whose heroic exploits extended from the Arctic region to the border line, and who carried the whole of the newer West upon their tireless shoulders? The thing was beyond his wildest dreams.

He could only stammer something incoherent in reply. Then Sergeant Ivan got down to tacks without the waste of words.

"I've got a job for a fellow of your sort, right now. Glad I'd be to have you take it on. Answer me just one or two questions, and you're the boy for me; couldn't have turned up at a better time."

"Right," said Bob, all keen attention, "ask anything you wish. My stars! I hope I'll do!"

"First, what sort of a ticket did you leave your college with; have you matriculated, or whatever you may call it over there?"

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"Only just," said Bob; "managed to scrape through last term."

"Can you shoot or ride?"

"Shoot, yes; but I've never been on a horse—don't know one end from the other."

The sergeant's grey eyes twinkled.

"We'll learn you on the trail, and double-quick at that. Can you swim and run?"

Bob laughed at this. He held the record for the school in both. The precision of his times and figures seemed to amuse the prairie pair. They told the sergeant what he wanted, though.

"You'll do," he said, "the scouting's good enough for the rest. I take it you can track and camp and look out a bit for yourself and others? Right! Then listen to what I've got to say."

Fairbanks, who had listened to this quick give and take, closed an eye behind Bob's back.

"Hold on," he put in, coming down on the four legs of his chair with something like a crash, "you don't know what you're letting yourself in for when you pile in with the police out West. They mollicoddle folk on the prairie, look out for their marryings

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and burials, and everything under the sun. How do you know but what he ain't going to take you for a school ma'am ? ”

“ I am,” said Sergeant Ivan, briefly, “ and that's exactly it.”

If the boy had been nonplussed between these two before, he was now completely floored.

Remembrance floated through his mind that the whole new West hung as much upon the benevolent activities of this famous force as upon its vigilance and discipline in every conceivable respect. But that Sergeant Ivan should offer him a tame job like this ! A job of teaching prairie kids ! It came, he regretfully surmised, of letting out about Frensham and all that.

“ Partly,” the trooper admitted, with a hearty laugh, “ but a fine sight more on account of your having been a scout. You ain't going to drop that now. You're going to be about the biggest thing in scouts what I can boost you up to. I'll have your rank confirmed by your own bosses, just as soon as you and me can do a deal. Now, hark !

“ Right way up north from here, some six miles east of one of the biggest of our

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Indian Reservations, there's a settlement of whites that's running a bit wild. There's breeds among 'em who are making trouble, putting liquor through to the Reservation. We call it rustling, same as in the old days when horses and cattle were lifted over the border, but now it's rustling whisky. The agent sent down word a week ago that the Indians was mad drunk, and half the squaws as well.

"Now, there's only myself, a corporal, and two troopers at the post, forty miles from here, and I can only spare one day to look into matters in the Creek. We have an area to patrol bigger than England twice over. My hands are full as I can manage without them breeds on Arrow Creek. It'll take me all my time to get there and return. And if I was to turn the settlement upside down I shouldn't find a spot, except the stuff the factor's got upon his books. The stuff's been run all right, and hidden, but goodness only knows where.

"Now, Quested, the proposition's this: You come along with me and get the young 'uns up at the settlement in hand with a view to squatting all this mischief. I want backing on the spot, patrols; and some spying out

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the land. Organise the boys, and let me feel I've got a second in the place, same as if I had a trooper posted there to watch the liquor running. If you're a scout, you ought to know how to set about the job. What have you got to say now, eh?"

"What have I got to say?" cried Bob, "why, Sergeant, that I'm your man, heart and sole and boots! It's a glorious commission, and I'm awfully proud to think you'd give it me."

Sergeant Ivan seemed well satisfied.

"See here," he went on, "it's known, pretty well, at the post, who's on this racket all the way from the railroad to the Creek, but what I want you to find out is where they cache the stuff. Those breeds ran two wagon-loads of whisky five nights ago in readiness for the annual treaty payments at the Reservation, and they're passing it along all the time, just from hand to hand. You've got to find the dump, and scrag the smugglers at the river, and get word down to me. Feel fit to take it on? I warn you it ain't exactly a soft job; you'll be up against one or two hard customers."

Young Qusted glowed, but he didn't want

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to sing small later on. This was a bit stiffer than the First Class Test! So he contented himself with the fewest words he could.

Sergeant Ivan clapped his hand to his knee, and rose.

"There's pay," he said, "attached to a school up there, what never has been opened 'cause no teacher would ever take it on. No reason why you shouldn't have it. Give the kids a bit of schooling, if you like, they are sure to need it bad, and use it as a cover and a handle. Teach 'em, if you can, but make a smart troop of 'em first, and get the yellow streak under at the Creek. I shall look for your reports, and give you all the support you'll need—officially."

He laid a hand on Bob's shoulder and moved towards the door.

"Fairbanks, we'll come along with you as far as your place, and perhaps you'll fix up my young trooper with a horse?"

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CHAPTER V.

BLACK WALT.

Sergeant Ivan's mount, a beautiful brown beast, was hitched among the sulkies and the buckboards outside the hotel, but Phil Fairbanks had left his wagon, in which Bob would ride, over at the hardware, on the corner opposite. They went across Main Street to reach it.

Next to the store was the post office, a little bank, like a rabbit-hutch, and a tiny white-painted church with a stove-pipe peeping above the wooden battlements of the tower.

There was a certain air of animation about Finlay that afternoon, sufficiently accounted for by Jake Carter's plot being heavily encumbered with a big consignment of new farm machinery. Every now and again a

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horseman loomed up on one or another of the trails, turned into the town at a careless lope, came floundering down the street and fetched up by the hardware and the forge. Bob took interested stock of all these fellows, and lent Fairbanks a willing hand in loading up the long blue-painted box on wheels which he called his wagon. Finally, the two of them clambered to the narrow board perched forward, which did duty for a seat, and pulled with many a shattering crash and bump into the road. The team was a good one, and set off with a will upon the homeward trail.

In two minutes or more they were clear of the town and heading north upon the open prairie, and for the first time Bob tasted that sense of boundless freedom which comes of knowing there is no such further hive of men between you and the Pole !

Homesteads there were at intervals, to right and left of the trail, marked here by a huddle of sod-roofed buildings backed against a bluff, there by a low log shack standing on the edge of a sloo, and always by an immense ribbon of brown ploughing scored across the smiling undulations of the land. Round the whole horizon the bleached prairie, tinged

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everywhere with the sodden verdure of the spring, melted into the blue of the cloudless sky. Vast swathes of pale ochre-coloured belts of the spring ploughing scored the face of the land; now and again the wagon jumbled near enough to some homesteader on the plough for Bob to smell the richness of the steaming clods and hear the tearing of the fibres as the share reeled them from its shining surface in long swales of gleaming earth.

Sergeant Ivan rode ahead and was soon out of sight of Fairbanks and the wagon. He had a call or so to make on the northward trip, and would reach the ranch a good few hours before the others could come up. Bob found it impossible to keep any sort of a seat upon the plank. He danced there like the proverbial pea upon a drum, and before they had gone five miles, felt that every joint in his body had been sprung, and every tooth jarred in his head.

The only thing to do was to imitate the driver.

Fairbanks stood bolt upright in the front of the wagon, feet well braced apart, and held the "lines" in a stoutly gauntleted pair of hands.

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More than once Bob made shift to get upon his legs, but another shattering jolt flung him down again upon the seat. The wagon had no springs, and the trail got rougher with every mile. It was to be wondered how any hubs and wheels and axles ever made could stand such wear and tear; how any cargo, even of steel and iron, like the present, could survive such transportation. The boy honestly began to doubt if his inside could possibly—at this appalling rate——crash! bang!—remain intact.

It was all he could do to hide a genuine consternation when presently they came to the lip of a steep ravine (a coulée, Fairbanks called it), with a thinly-wooded drop below, straight, almost, as a house! Over the team went without a moment's hesitation, the wagon right atop of them, sliding sideways to the bottom. Fairbanks held his horses up with an iron grip, but the branches of the trees whipped him sharply in the face, and blood trickled from a score that burned across Bob's cheek.

Next minute, and the beasts were in the broad stream at the bottom, struggling for a foothold among the rocks and stones where the

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water lashed itself to fury in a hundred little rapids.

If this was a "trail," Bob wondered what it must be like to drive a wagon upon the prairie where there wasn't one. The hillside opposite looked absolutely unnegotiable! Nevertheless, they went straight for it, up and up, at the foolhardiest angle in the world. Two great brown backs straining in the traces, eight powerful legs gripping upon the hillside, the wagon reeling crazily behind them, with all the machinery shifted to the back, and Bob clinging to the sides for dear life. Then they came out again upon the top, and went rattling on again as though the passage of the coulée was nothing to a prairie team!

Fairbanks turned to have a look at his bruised and shattered hired man, and Bob made what shift he could to grin.

"Here," cried the other, laughing, "come and take the lines; you're kinda gettin' scared!"

"I'm not," retorted Bob, "I'm only tumbling all clean to bits. How much farther have we got to go?"

"A good ten mile; but the trail's pretty

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level from now on. Come and take the cattle."

There was no getting out of it. Bob dragged himself up somehow, planted his feet wide apart as he could, and made a lunge for the reins ("lines," his mentor called them), much as a landsman hangs on to a stay at sea. He knew he'd pitch out head foremost in another minute.

Then he had them—firmly—and the horses seemed to know it. They slackened in their pace a trifle, and the brutal wagon let up on its wildest gambols. A glorious breeze swept over the sun-smitten silent land, and a wind that had in it a touch of elixir cooled his flushed and wounded cheek. Bob braced himself again, but instead of trying to keep stiff, let his knees yield to the swinging and the jolting, so that he got on that way ever so much better. He felt some communication along these prairie "lines" of the sagacity and power of the team he drove, as if the horses themselves bade him stand up to the job, and they would see him bravely through.

He set his mouth like a trap, and resolved more than ever to hold on, when they came to a stretch around the foot of a swelling,

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down where the trail tilted like a racing track, and Ladybird was as much as a couple of hands higher than her tracemate, Judge. Fairbanks managed somehow to sit easily enough upon the seat, his hands hanging slack between his knees, ready at a moment's notice to take over.

Suddenly they heard the beat of hoofs ahead and a mounted man swung round the bend. He came on rapidly, without pretence of drawing rein, until within an ace of the tilted team and wagon. He was a swarthy fellow, with black eyes that snapped as he caught sight of Bob in Fairbank's place, and an ugly row of teeth showed between his lips.

He whirled his supple mount with one practised hand, bent forward on the inspiration of a lucky moment, raising his right arm high above his head, brought his quirt down with a stinging lash full upon the flank of the mare, and was off like a stone from a catapult.

Ladybird plunged violently, frightening Judge, who forthwith bolted. Over went the wagon with a crash, flinging its contents far and wide, and the two men head over heels upon the trail. One of the traces gave,

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but the other held, and the team careered madly off, scared by the wreckage thrashing at their heels.

* * * * *

When Bob came to himself, the sun was low down in the western heaven.

It was lower still before the boy's senses seemed to clear, and he could bring to mind what had happened. He was shocked from head to foot, and ached in every limb. But otherwise he found himself apparently unhurt. He could even stand, with an effort, and make shift to take in his surroundings.

He had pitched into a soggy sort of hollow where the melting snows had sunk down among some long coarse grass, and saved his head and shoulder a worse crack than they seemed to have sustained. But it was otherwise with Fairbanks, who lay farther out, and still seemed quite insensible.

Bob bent over him, anxiety clutching at his heart. This was a very different thing from first-aid practice! Here he was all alone, with a badly injured man, having to find out what was up for himself, and to

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decide what to do when there seemed no means of doing anything.

He went upon one knee and lifted Fairbanks's eyelid with a cautious finger, gently touching him upon the eyeball. Lord! he hoped it wasn't concussion, and looked for blood about his head and ears. Then, awfully gingerly, he turned the flaccid body on its back, and put a hand inside the shirt above the heart. It beat right enough, but jolly slowly, hardly forty to the minute. Bob straightened out the limbs and discovered to his horror that one of Fairbanks's legs was broken. Beastly fracture, too! What the ambulance book used to call a "compound fracture," with the blood all squirting.

Suddenly Bob's wits brisked up—he must get this seen to before the poor chap came round. In a trice he had whipped off Fairbanks's boot, ripped up his trouser, and got a tourniquet upon the artery with his handkerchief and a bit of stick. Then he found himself grasping the knee with one hand and the ankle with the other. It wasn't a job for a single pair of hands, but that awful kink had got to be straightened out! One horrid wrench and pull, living tissues in your

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hands ! and the protruded bit of bone seemed to disappear. The mess of blood mucked things up pretty badly, but if he hadn't done it then, the swelling would have prevented any hope of setting the bones a little later on. They seemed to be in place, and the position of the foot looked right. The anxious young surgeon compared the two legs with the utmost care. Then he unbuckled his belt, whipped his shirt over his head, and, tearing it into a dozen strips, made shift to bandage the wound as best he might. Two long rake handles from the litter of farm stuff on the trail had to serve as splints. My eye ! how Bob wished he had a handy patrol about him now, with iodine and dressings, and a decent stretcher ! Phil Fairbanks was beastly green about the gills, and jolly cold. Bob left him and went in search of his knapsack, with the sheepskin in it. He rolled it round the injured man and added both their coats.

What next ? There wasn't even any water to be seen !

He stood up, scanning the prairie in all directions. It looked an empty world, empty, someone once said, as that fair solitude through which Adam and Eve had originally

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walked. Not a soul in sight, not a human habitation, not a bird in the wide blue sky. There was no sign of the horses ; no sign of help or succour anywhere.

Bob felt something of the loneliness of the trail ; something of the responsibility that makes men need a " pard " when they venture into the empty spaces. He might have been forgiven for feeling " done." He stood near Fairbanks, drawn and thoughtful ; ten years older, as far as experience went, than the last time he and the Golden Eagles had been out on hike. Again his eyes swept the great acres of the prairie ; they missed a thousand things trained vision would have easily detected. But as the sun sank ever lower and lower, shadows fell, and little things stood out as the enormous bumps of macadam show up under a motor's headlight on the smoothest road. Bob peered and doubted, peered, and looked again. Could that be a shanty of some sort away there on the left ; or was it a mark upon the land ? And if it *was* a house, how could he hope to get Fairbanks transported thither ; and how could he leave him to come to, perhaps alone ?

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Bob Qusted had resource, and an idea occurred to him just in case it *was* a house.

He turned his knapsack upside down, and searched amid the various spilling for a little leather case of brushes and things, with his soap box in it, and his tooth paste. He had a notion that there was a square of mirror stuck in it at the back.

Good egg! There was!

He tossed the contents aside, turned back the leather flaps, and faced the broad smile of the sinking sun. He caught a glorious beam of it full on the little mirror and flashed a heliographic ray in the direction of the house. It might be too faint, too far, no earthly use; there might be no glazing in the shanty, but it was his only chance. Bob did deliberate, regular things with that long beam of sunlight until the golden orb veiled itself in the red haze of the prairie's edge, and behind the boy, in the translucent green of the evening sky a single star hung like a point of diamond.

After that, there was nothing more he could think of to be done except rip up another shirt and tie the tails to a couple of sticks to do some flag-wagging if anyone

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upon a trail, far or near, should have a notion of the code. He would not crouch down, even to chafe Phil Fairbanks's hard and corded arms, and move the blood in them a bit ; he had to keep a sharp look-out on the off-chance of someone on a trail. Long he stood beside the still figure on the ground, and ceaselessly he strained his sight.

Things baffled him, and danced before his eyes. A horseman was on him before he could believe the evidence of his untrained senses. The figure seemed to rise from the darkening ground. Then came the soft thudding of the hoofs.

Bob heard the creak of saddle leather and the jingle of a curb. Next minute a beautiful brown bay loomed up, and Sergeant Ivan had swung himself to the ground before she rightly answered to the check of the bridle ; he threw it over her head, leaving it to trail upon the grass.

"Land's sakes, young man," he exclaimed, making direct for Fairbanks where he lay, and dropping on a knee beside him, "you two seem to have hit a peck of trouble. What's the meaning of all this ?"

He was unscrewing the cap of a water-

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bottle as he spoke, and now lifted up the injured man's head, and very gently put the tin cup to his lips. He glanced at Bob and then at the rough dressing on the broken leg.

Fairbanks was struggling back to consciousness. His blue lips groped for the cup.

Bob took it and held it while the sergeant sought and found his brandy flask.

"Here," he said, "let's add a dash of this. Phil, old man, look alive. You ain't dead yet, not by a long way. Here, get outside a drop of this. What in the world have you been doing with yourselves?"

Bob made a brief report; he—Bob—had been driving, and a man came along and slashed at the horses. They bolted instantly, and he and Fairbanks had been thrown from the wagon. Fairbanks's leg was badly broken. Bob had set it as best he could; had the sergeant any iodine?

Ivan clapped his hand to his tunic.

"I've a first field dressing," he said, "but I doubt if we'd better meddle with it again until we get him under shelter. How long have you been here? What was the fellow like?"

"Hours," said Bob; "we'd made good

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time coming this far from the town. As for the man, he looked a dago, but it all happened in such a flash I got no more impression of him than that."

"There's toughs among the railroad settlements and all through the country, standing in with the whisky men at Arrow Creek," the sergeant told him, "so it ain't far to see the meaning of this here. Fairbanks has always backed the police, and they've got it in for him. Black Walt was pretty sharp to see his chance this afternoon. I'd passed him on the trail and he probably knew where I was bound. See here, my lad, we've got to get Phil on my mare. Can you bear a hand? I can lift him; you watch out for his leg."

But Fairbanks was unfit to sit the horse, and the sergeant hit on a better arrangement. Bob should ride and take the injured man across the crupper. The policeman himself would walk and make shift to help to hold him safe. In that way Bess would be spared too heavy a double burden. Did the lad think he could manage?

"Sure," Bob said, he'd manage somehow, if it was a broncho they wanted him to straddle, and made heroic shift to mount. The

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beautiful chestnut would forgive and help his awkwardness in the circumstances, and she certainly did. She stepped as gently and as evenly as if she knew she bore a sufferer.

Then the sergeant set out at Bob's knee, one hand upon the slack figure behind him, and they finished what they had to say, slowly wending over the prairie towards the tiny shack the scout thought he had detected amid the shadows of the evening.

"That was a dandy notion," Ivan commended him, "to use the helio., Quested. Good for you! Lucky thing I happened to drop in on Henessy; I picked up the message just before he lit the lamp, but couldn't be quite sure. We'll get there in an hour."

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CHAPTER VI.

BOB'S RIDING MASTER.

Before the sorry little cavalcade had traversed half the distance to the shack, dusk was deepening to night across the illusive land. Bob could make nothing of the prairie in the growing darkness, save for that tiny point of light ahead, which beckoned them on.

The going was slow and tentative.

"The ground is rotten," Sergeant Ivan warned him, "with gopher holes, and Bessie knows it. 'Twouldn't never do for her to put her foot in one and stumble now. You can't ride reckless on the prairie, ever."

Bob had never heard of gophers, but was too dog-tired to care what sort of beasts they might be, or to make enquiry. The mare's shoulders so seemed to drop with every step she took, she might have been putting her

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foot in a hole each time. He knew enough to grip her with his knees, but reflected desperately, sleepily, that his first essay in horsemanship out West was about as odd and unlike the cinema version of affairs as his recent exploit with the wagon.

They went on, plodding silently, and drew nearer to the cabin by degrees. As they mounted a little slope—Bob felt it in the horse's back—a square of light opened ahead, throwing up in silhouette the figure of a man who emerged upon the trail towards them, a storm lantern swinging in his hand.

"That you, sergeant?" came his hail; "hope nothing's wrong."

Ivan shouted to him to fetch along a blanket; they'd got an injured man, and some sort of stretcher would be needed.

But a moment or so later they were there, and Bob drew rein, slipping thankfully to the ground, one hand gripped in Bessie's mane.

Fairbanks was so far recovered as to be protesting that he could stand right enough—they didn't need to carry him, if only they would unlash his legs and let him get a hold on someone's shoulder. Henessy and the

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sergeant conveyed him thus inside the shack, and deposited him, breathing rather heavily, in the straw-filled bunk behind the door which was the sole bed of which the place could boast. The homesteader came out again to put the mare into the stable, leaving the other two to make a second overhaul of Fairbanks's leg.

Ivan gave it as his opinion that the fracture had been reduced all right, and the less anyone meddled with it for the next few days the better.

"We'll get you home, Phil, come the morning, and send old mother James to keep an eye on you, if we can get her."

"I say," Bob interjected, "but he ought to go to hospital. What about sepsis setting in, or tetanus, or any rotten thing of that sort?"

The homesteader and the policeman laughed.

"Don't do to think about 'em," Ivan said, "and anyhow, there ain't so many germs in virgin soil. There ain't no hospital, neither, within a couple of hundred miles of here. This is the West, my boy, don't you forget it!"

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And meanwhile, grub was the first consideration.

Mike Henessy came back, "tickled to death," as he expressed it to hear their yarn, and busied himself slinging all sorts of oddments of food and stuff upon the table. He seized a couple of poplar billets and thrust them into the fire-box, when the bright flames sprang up. A billycan of water from the tank on the far side of the battered, rusty stove, soon boiled over the roundel, and Bob poured it—under his directions—on to a fistful of strong green tea in the bottom of an old granite-ware coffee pot. A couple of prairie chickens were yanked from out the oven—the customary larder of the prairie bachelor—together with a plate of new made "biscuits," his ten-minutes' substitute for bread. Milk, Mike had in a tin, and a soggy-looking mess of potatoes mixed up with previous things, like pork and eggs, in a serviceable but singularly ill-requited frying-pan. Then they ransacked the place for knives and forks and enough crockery to make do with. They found jam pots—and Bob rinsed them—which served well enough for cups, and improvised or shared as to the rest. It was quite a

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gorgeous spread, all told, and the four of them brought to it the sauce of sharp-set appetites, for Mike himself had been at work since sun-up, and eaten nothing since a meal at twelve.

Bob, however, was more than half-asleep long before the supper was concluded. What with the excessive weariness, the events of his first day on the prairie, and the warmth and repletion now, he could take no further stock of Mike Henessy and the shack, or follow the consultation into which his companions plunged.

He was only sleepily aware of the Canadian-Irishman's fleshy, unshaven jowl behind the coal-oil lamp, and the face of Fairbanks in the shadows there, down in the bunk, of Sergeant Ivan's voice outlining some plan he—Bob—would have given all he owned to follow. But his head was huge as a haystack, and as heavy as lead. It lolled forward on his breast, and the whole world was blotted out.

When he awoke next morning he found he had slept, for the first time in his life, on the bare floor, with nothing but his coat for a pillow. The sun was already high in the heavens, and the other occupants of the

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shack had been stirring themselves to some purpose, for breakfast was just ready. Odours of coffee and frizzling bacon pleasantly assailed Bob's nostrils. He sat up and gazed amazedly about him, wondering for the moment where he was. Henessy and the sergeant were nowhere to be seen ; Phil Fairbanks had made shift to fling aside the grey Hudson Bay blankets of his bunk, and hoist himself to a chair whence he might give an eye to what was going forward on the stove.

Bob looked round in vain for any sign of bedroom "fixin's," and had decided to tumble up, like a dog with no more of a toilet than a shake, and keep his head shut on the tactless subject of a wash, when Fairbanks caught sight of his face and grinned.

"Round the back," he said, "you'll find the well and a pail. But Mike don't run to fancy notions ; can't say as I know just where you'll find a towel."

"Thanks, ever so much," the boy returned, laughing, "I'll manage right enough without a wipe so long as I can get some sort of a swill down. What are you going to do about it ?"

Fairbanks indicated the billycan and a

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tin bowl that had fallen behind the stove, and spilt its contents of unpeeled potatoes all among the kindling.

"If you'll fish up that gadget I'll make out fine; right here Mike's a rare good sort, but he ain't kinda fussy when it comes to soap and water. No time for it, I guess."

Bob "fixed" things for the farmer, then went out into the clean radiance of the morning, stripped to the waist, hauled himself a bucket of ice-cold water, and sluiced away with it every vestige of thickheadedness and "fug." There was no doubt about it, that shack overnight had been distinctly foggy, with the stove going, and three unwashed men in it, one with the sweat-soaked garments on him which were all he owned.

Mike Henessy was typical of the men who come "in" to a newly opened district and take up land without a cent behind them, or anything to depend upon but the strength of their bodies and the will to make good. He had fought hail and drought, frost and fire, season after season, and known what it was to harvest a bumper crop only when grain was not worth the cost of hauling to the railroad. The single room of which his shack consisted

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was scarcely more habitable than the log and sod cabin in the rear in which he stabled his horses. And yet the man went on with indomitable grit and perseverance, living the life of an anchorite and staking his all on hope.

The idea this morning, the sergeant said, when he came in from grooming down the mare, was to hitch up Mike's old box-wagon, load Fairbanks into it, and return to the scene of yesterday's spill in order to collect the scattered implements, en route to Fairbanks's place, ten miles farther on. They would find the horses, Judge and Ladybird, when they got there, but probably not much else. Phil's wagon would be lying somewhere on the prairie smashed to smithereens.

The task of driving devolved upon Bob to-day in real earnest, and it was with considerable inward trepidation that he took it on. If the prairie was going to "hump" him in this way he must rise to its demands, however rough and brief its schooling, and make no lily-livered sign.

He lent a hand in putting in the horses, and saw at a glance nothing very high spirited was to be expected of this slack and worn-out

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pair. As for the trail, it bumped and crashed, but kept fairly on the level and threaded no more precipitous ravines. Sergeant Ivan rode with Bob and Fairbanks as far as the place where Black Walt had played them his low-down trick, and helped the boy get the machinery and implements aboard the wagon, regardless then and there of whatever injury they had sustained. He had time to make up, so went off again, "fixing" to fetch Phil's ranch about midday, when he and his young recruit would continue their journey.

The pair in the wagon contrived to reach Fairbanks's place without further mishap, and Bob had just a glimpse of what homesteading could look like under favourable or long-established circumstances. Fairbanks had a jolly decent house with a bit of verandah tacked on to it—only he called it a "piazzer"—where a hammock swung, a patch of garden on the banks of a sloo as big as a miniature lake at home, and a whole range of stoutly-fenced corrals and well-built barns and stables sheltered by a bluff of poplar trees that clothed a slight rise in the rear.

There should be Uly—his other hired hand—about the place, Fairbanks told the boy

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as he carefully manœuvred round the sloo. It was midday, and the man would have knocked off work for dinner and to bait his team. Sure enough a thin spiral of smoke rose from the chimney, and a figure came out of the house watching their approach. Uly, indeed, recognised Mike's sorry outfit from afar, and exclaimed with surprise and a ready helpfulness when Bob brought it to a standstill, and Fairbanks, grunting, explained that he had sustained a busted leg.

"Sure, I wondered what had kept you, and supposed the stuff was all behind," the fellow said, "and it's a bad thing to have you in this shape right now! Can you make shift to hop indoors?"

Between them, he and Bob got Fairbanks "fixed," and made short work of the ensuing meal.

Sergeant Ivan came along before it was over, sorry that old mother James hadn't proved available, and in two minds whether or not to leave Bob behind to give an eye to the crippled Phil. But the hired man scouted the suggestion, when he learnt how matters stood. If he couldn't "watch out" for that leg all right, and work double tides as well

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until the boss got around again, his name wasn't Ulysses Brown.

Ulysses, Bob discovered, was the richest customer he had yet struck in the West. He seemed to know everything; the grades of wheat, the weights and price of wool, the soundness of grain, the management of cows, the temperature of cream, the chances of the season—and all this 'twixt the house and the pasture. After dinner the two of them went off to round up the "pinto" for the scout.

"Say, she's the daintiest little pony on the prairie," Uly told him, "and is supposed to bring good luck. Them pintos, them black and whites, is looked upon as awful lucky by the Indians. Watch out you don't lose her on the Creek." He took a saddle from its peg upon the stable wall and went out with it upon his arm, whistling across the corral.

A couple of horses who had been standing side by side looking over a gate at the far end, pricked up their ears, turned, and came cantering to the summons.

Uly slipped a bridle over the head of each and lightly swung the saddle to the back of one of them and buckled up its girths.

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"You take Coureur," he said; "bare-back will do well enough for me."

"See here, Ulysses, I can't ride; I was never on a horse in my life before last night. You'll have to put me through it."

Bob set his foot in the stirrup as he spoke and somehow managed to swing himself into position. Again he had that queer sensation of sitting on a very unstable ridge. He leaned forward and patted the glossy neck beneath him, groping instinctively for an understanding with his horse.

The prairie fellow laughed and vaulted to the other creature's back, a light coil of rope upon his arm.

"You'll ride all right," he said, "after the first good gallop, and we'll get that on the range."

They started, side by side, and were soon beyond the homestead, going at an easy pace. Then both horses broke into the long, elastic lope which covers the grassy leagues out West as no iron-shod hoofs could beat it out upon a road.

Brown was at Bob's side, a word now for his hand upon the rein, another for his knee grip, telling him not to try to bump, but to

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give entirely to the action of the horse. The boy had a fair seat, and was not inclined to stoop. He found himself, indeed, confident—all right—enjoying it. A gay wind struck him in the face, the glorious plain ahead gave a fillip to his sense of high adventure. This was riding—riding on the prairie! Coureur threw up his head and did something extraordinary to his gears. Suddenly Bob felt himself in full career—and sticking on! The ground flew by, there was a rhythmic drumming in his ears, and a strong pulling on the rein. Coureur had stretched himself for a gallop, and the other horse kept up. Bob gave all his strength and wits to the job of sticking on, and found himself knocked about a bit as to his breath, but gloriously exhilarated, when at length Coureur was through with this, and dropped of his own accord into his former stride.

Ulysses Brown turned a grinning face upon the tenderfoot.

"Some ride, eh?" he demanded; "feel you're going to like it?"

"Fine," cried the boy, with a joyous laugh, and went ahead again.

He was feeling more confident now, and

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happy in company with the beautiful creature he bestrode. They topped an incline, skirted a belt of willow scrub, and sighted a herd of cattle about a mile beyond. Coureur obeyed Bob's hand upon his bridle when he drew over to the left, and dropping behind his companion went dancing along with short, elastic steps in the wake of the bare-back rider.

The pinto, Ulysses "opined," would not be far to seek. She would hang around that bunch of cattle, likely ; she might come up of her own accord when she saw the other horses, or if she were in a playful mood she might need to be cut-out and roped.

They caught sight of her, a graceful creature with a tail that brushed the ground, on the far side of the herd, and throwing up her pretty head, she caught sight of them.

For a moment she stood still, and flung a shrill whinney on the air. Next second she was off, her long tail streaming in the wind.

Clapping his heels to his horse's flanks, Ulysses made after her, circling wide to head her off and turn her from the right. Coureur sprang forward, too, and laid himself for a wild few minutes straight to the ground.

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Both horses understood the game. Bob found himself carried without connivance of his own, right into the thick of the stampeded cattle. Ulysses was on their flank going like the wind, and drawing in upon the flying pinto, suddenly flung the lariat ; it missed, but came whirling to hand again, and the last Bob saw of Brown was his arm raised high aloft for another cast. The rope was swinging about his head, then a press of the red, horned beasts surged by, and Bob found himself hemmed in.

Left to himself, Coureur would have made a bee line for the wilful pony, but an unpractised hand upon his bridle swung him round, and the next moment one of the lumbering steers bumped into his withers. He swerved, and jumped violently to one side, flinging Bob clean out of the saddle.

What happened next, the boy had no idea. He lay amid a forest of trampling legs and huge, cloven hoofs, winded, choked and bruised. A cloud of dust was all about him, every second he expected to have his brains dashed out. He couldn't move ; he had no breath, and an inch more on this side or on that might have spelt instant death. His instinct bade him fling an arm about his

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head, and bury his face down in the sod. And a nightmare thundered all about him, dinning destruction in his ears.

And then it passed. The herd hurtled by and went careering off across the prairie. Not a hoof had struck or stamped upon him anywhere. The boy lay still, bunched as it were, into the tiniest dimensions, not daring to believe the danger over. The next thing he knew was a soft nuzzling about the neck. Turning his face, he saw a trembling fetlock within an inch of his eyes. He was lying right beneath Coureur, and the beast had dropped its nose to make sure that he was safe.

Bob rolled from the shelter of the sagacious animal's legs, and struggled to his feet. He leaned an aching forehead for a moment against the beautiful brown neck, and laid an awfully grateful hand upon it.

"You darling," he said, as the full dark eye was turned upon him gently, "you saved my life, Coureur! Now help me get up on your back again by standing as still as houses, and I vote we keep my tumble to ourselves. Don't give me away to Uly. I've got to learn to ride!"

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He was up again, as a matter of fact, and trotting off before the other had had a chance to note the incident. The pinto had led Brown a merry chase before the noose settled around her head, and when he turned at length with her in tow, it was only to meet a dusty-looking boy who came loping along with more of a horseman's seat than he had at first betrayed.

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CHAPTER VII.

ARROW CREEK.

They got away from Fairbanks's ranch—the sergeant and Bob Quested—by three o'clock in the afternoon. Bob bestrode the pinto, whose name was Queenie, and carried a rifle at his back. He had wanted Phil to let him buy it badly, but the homesteader said no; he'd prefer to do a trade if Bob would part with his slicker.

Bob was willing enough, but it didn't seem to him quite fair, especially as the rifle was by no means on its last legs yet. In fact, it was in pretty decent condition, and accounted for itself quite creditably when he had occasion to use it that very afternoon. They scared up a covey of prairie chickens on the trail, and Bob, slinging the thing to his

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shoulder quick as thought, brought down a plump little beggar for the pot. It was a beautiful bird, something like a small grouse, or an outsize in quails, and wonderfully good eating, as the scout already knew. When dusk fell and Sergeant Ivan hit upon a likely camp site, Bob took over the cooking as a matter of course, and handled that chicken according to the best tradition of the Golden Eagles.

It was a topping place where they were to spend the night, a little bluff or spinney at the bottom of a slight depression where spread the waters of a sloo, like a blue eye in the immensity of the plain, reflecting the azure of the skies. Above it now hung a pale, sickle moon. All around, the prairie was fast melting into imperceptibility, vast and shadowy under a tense silence—a silence that could be felt.

Only when the horses were unharnessed and turned loose with hobbles on their feet, and the meal had been disposed of, had Bob time to realise how sore and saddle-galled he had become. Every movement took it out of him, and he was jolly glad not to have a tent to pitch. He and Ivan would presently roll up upon their ground sheets upon a light

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bedding of the willows fringing all the sloo, and sleep under the stars.

"My giddy aunt!" he drew his breath, hissing between his teeth, as he managed to sit down. The camp fire burned up cheerily in the increasing dusk; for a moment or two he sat and stared at it, recalling Frensham, Scoutmaster Paine, Ted Hunter, his particular chum, the Head—and all the chaps! If he had known round those camp fires at home how soon he was to begin to find out what it meant to be upon the trail in earnest! Every movement reflected itself in some fresh facial contortion.

Sergeant Ivan smoked in silence for a while, betraying little of the satisfaction that was his at having roped in this promising young Englisher. Nothing had escaped him, so far, of Bob's pluck and general handiness. It was not his policy, however, to comment on it, and he confined himself now to a brief direction or two concerning those same saddle galls.

It was the hour of rest and yarning, the hour round the camp fire before taps.

Sergeant Ivan fell into a vein of tale-telling. He rolled upon an elbow to bring

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his head and shoulders well into the smoke (the "smudge"), blowing from the blazing sticks, and save himself from the mosquitoes who were beginning to get busy.

"Above all things," he said, "take care of your feet. I remember a wonderfully queer thing as to feet that happened years ago when I was in the Army out in India. There were twenty of us fellows in the section. Suddenly one died; he hadn't been sick in any way, so the M.O. put it down as heart failure, and he was buried. They had an auction, afterwards, of his effects.

"Then, a very short time after, another of the chaps went and died just as short and sudden, with nothing to explain it. And they gave that, too, as heart disease. He was buried within twenty-four hours, like the first one, and his dunnage sold among the rest. And when a third man went and died—all in the same section, mind you—just as sudden and mysterious, the fellows wouldn't stand for these dicky hearts no more; they got the wind up, and wanted an enquiry. Soldiers are superstitious, just like sailors. The whole section got uncomfortable. Everybody wondered whose turn was coming next.

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But the Company Sergeant-Major was a sharp one, he was, and seemed to get on to things at once.

"He went into the enquiry first with an examination of clothes and things that had belonged to the third dead man when they came up for disposal like the others. Then it turned out that this last chap had bought a pair of boots which had belonged to the second one that died, and he, in turn, had originally bought them from the first. The tabs and the regimental numbers showed the sequence plain. So the authorities ordered them boots to be sequestered and thoroughly examined. They were actually cut up and every bit of leather minutely examined. Then it was found that in one of the uppers there was something sticking what looked like a tiny thorn. But it wasn't a thorn at all. It turned out to be the poison fang of a particularly venomous grass snake. The creature had struck at the wearer of them boots one day out marching and left its fang sticking in the leather. All the poison was discharged of course, but it had soaked in and dried there.

"Now, when the next man come to wear

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them boots the little fang was sharp enough to prick, but not to hurt, and the skin, with a tiny spot of blood on it, and the sweat and that, was in contact with the poisoned leather, moistening it and drawing in the death that lurked there. The three men wore the same boots, and all succumbed. Shows how you can never be too careful about tiny things, *and looking till you find the cause, no matter how mysterious a happening may appear to be.*

"These skitters, now," sitting up and making an exasperated clap or two at them between his palms, "is apt to do a tidy bit of harm," and the sergeant proceeded to give Bob the benefit of an old campaigner's experience on a score of kindred subjects, until the latter suddenly rolled over fast asleep.

Next morning they were up at dawn, and had "hit the trail" again after a breakfast of boiled beans well washed down with tea.

They got on famously together, and Bob fell more and more in love with Queenie every league they went.

She was the 'cutest little piece of horse-flesh imaginable, was full of pretty tricks, and had been used to any amount of petting. She required it now of Bob, and came up to him

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about the camp, diving her soft nose into his pockets, or standing with one hoof uplifted, begging for accustomed dainties. She had the springy, easy gait of the creature he had ridden yesterday, but was light under his hand as thistledown, with a keenly sensitive mouth, and quick, flirting ears which responded to every word and tone. Her eye spoke volumes. It was full, and deep, and plummy. Bob hooked his arm about her neck and felt Queenie would make of him "a rider of the plains" if only for love of her. She was a piebald, in great decorative patches of black and white, with the points of a true Indian cayuse.

Bob and the sergeant kept the northward trail all day, and towards evening the endless undulations of the prairie began to give place to more rugged country, dotted with lakes and covered with thin forest. The two companions had been threading their way for some hours through dim aisles of larch, and firs, and pine, over slopes or ridges, which endlessly succeeded one another, when Bob noticed a greyness in the air almost like the beginnings of a sea fret, or autumnal mist at home. But there came no freshness

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with it ; the atmosphere among the hills was less clear than on the plain ; it was resinous and strangely warm.

The elder man had been alive to the significance of these indications for the last half-hour or more.

"Forest fire somewhere," he observed, "probably across the river ; but it's early for 'em yet."

"My hat !" the scout exclaimed, "you don't mean a fire in a forest like this ?"

"Sure," returned the other, "only a very great deal bigger. Fires do an incalculable lot of damage when they gets good and going through the country up this way. I've known 'em burn for weeks on end over a tract ten times the size of Yorkshire, and then the air hangs heavy as a fog for hundreds of miles, and it's as hot as midsummer. Nothing puts 'em out until the rains come. All depends upon the wind how far they travel."

He reined up as he spoke, and took his hat off, running a handkerchief about his head and neck.

"Seems to me it's gettin' thicker, but them folks at the settlement will be safe. You're always safe near water."

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Bob was thrilled. The forest looked to him interminable: serried ranks of larch and pine clothed the hills in all directions as far as the eye could see. No human agency could do battle with a fire running there, especially with the wind behind it. Tenderfoot as he was, the mere imagination of it staggered him.

"This one, if it is the only one," Ivan went on, "may be hundreds of leagues away for all that we can tell. Let's hope it won't come down upon the Creek."

"What about the Reservation, Sergeant—whereabouts does that lie?"

"Farther up the river, a matter of five or six miles; they've guards drove in all directions through the forest—belts, you know, of clearing, and likely we'll find most of the boys giving an eye to things when we hit the settlement. The only way you can fight fire in the forest is to isolate it, and watch it don't jump the rides."

Bob overwhelmed his companion with his interest in this terrific subject, and wondered that the horses showed no fear.

"Tain't near enough," the other explained, "besides, they're used to fires. These folk at Arrow Creek ain't got no neighbours,

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save the Indians, to bear a hand, but they're right above the river and can shelter on the sand bars from the fire—if it comes. Let's hope the wind won't change."

Bob, too, lifted his cap to test on the dampness of his heated brow which way the slight airs set. There seemed to be little wind in any direction just then, only that faint greyiness in the heavy atmosphere.

They held on steadily for another hour, noting little change as they advanced, and came at weary length to a line of cabins, mostly built of untrimmed logs, along a ridge overlooking a wide valley through which a broad and shining river wound a fantastic sweeping course. This was the settlement at Arrow Creek, numbering perhaps a couple of hundred whites and a sprinkling of half-breeds.

The newcomers rode into the village just as darkness fell, and drew rein at Peter Marchant's store, the only frame building in the place.

It consisted of a long, low room, thrown out at right angles to the comparatively insignificant log house attached. There was a verandah in front, whose boards were

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cracked and dirty, with rails and tying posts. A skeleton gauze-covered door that shut with a powerful spring, kept the mosquitoes out of the room within.

Sergeant Ivan swung himself from the saddle, Bob following his example, hitched up his horse, and tramped straight in.

Perhaps the crowd lounging about Peter Marchant's counters had got wind of his being on the trail; they evinced no marked surprise to see him, nor, perhaps any great cordiality.

"Now, boys," Ivan announced himself, "I've made the Creek again, and shall want a word with you come presently. Meantime, where's the fire? How long have you had it thick?"

The factor straightened himself.

"Four days, thereabouts," he replied, "but we ain't takin' chances, Sergeant. The rides are clear. Most of the boys have been at work on them best part of the time. You can see 'em for yourself."

He was a thickly-built man of middle height, this storekeeper, about forty years of age. His face was full of a certain force and character, and not ill-looking. He was

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clean-shaven, and compared favourably in that respect with many others in the room. He had blunt, decisive features, and keen, deep-set eyes, under brows which drew together with two strong vertical lines between across the bridge of a short, thick nose. There was humour, perhaps, as well as age and shrewdness in the crows' feet that marked their outer corners.

He did the honours, more or less ; cleared a knot of boys from around the stove, sent a man to put up the trooper's horse and that of his companion, and bestirred himself to shout orders for a meal through the door leading to the house, and guessed Ivan and the scout would " stop over till the morrow."

" Sure thing," returned the other, quick to note that the company had grown appreciably fewer in the last few minutes, " and one of us a good bit longer. Say, Wally," catching a youngster by the ear and bringing him to the right about, " I've got a lot of news for you and that harum-scarum of a sister Sadie. I've got a bit of news for the whole bunch of you kids, and I shouldn't be surprised if it don't please you any."

The boy squirmed under that portentous

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pinch, but he turned a grinning face to Sergeant Ivan. Walter Marchant was used to rougher pleasantries than this.

"Leggo!" he said, "leggo my ear, and tell us what it is. I've got it in for Sadie."

"You have? Well you can just put it round to her and all the rest that they're going to set up at last, and take a bit o' notice. See this feller here?" yanking the ten-year-old before Bob; "this is Mr. Robert Quested. I've brought him straight along with me to rope in you kids and put the lot of you to school."

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHIEF OF THE OPECHEES.

Sergeant Ivan and his companion put up for the night at the trading post, and a decent sort the factor seemed to be. Peter Marchant acted up there on the Sakwasew as middleman between the trappers of the region and the buyers for one of the world-famed fur companies of the West. Most of the settlers at Arrow Creek lived in this fashion, and the store was packed with "trade," and with bales (in the factory itself), of undressed skins, all the foxes—cross, silver, black, and red—marten, bear, lynx, wolverine, muskrat, cariboo ; together with those of the little fellows found in the muskegs beyond the limit of big game, the wawpoos, and musquash, the otter and the nukik.

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Next morning, the entire settlement gathered in the post to discuss the feasibility, in view of the advancing fire, of moving out on to the sand bars in the river. Everything was veiled in a blue haze of smoke ; it hung in the valley like a pall, and almost blotted out the serried ranks of trees upon the farther shore. All other business had to give way to this, for Marchant himself was already debating how best to clear the factory should the blaze come from the land side with a wind behind it.

Sergeant Ivan's call had been made at an unpropitious moment ; enormous peril threatened, and the issue of the whisky trouble seemed a small one in the place of it.

It was scarcely opportune for him to do more, confronting the crowd on Marchant's porch, than to give one or two of the dark-visaged fellows there straight warning that he had his eye upon them, and that he knew their game. Bob, at his elbow, watched a fellow here and there whose truculence, albeit nonchalant and silent, did not escape the sergeant's notice.

" This is not the first time, boys," he told them, " there's been complaints against you

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lodged with the force. You, John Walt, can tell that black brother of yours from me, soon as ever he hits town again, that he'd better go to earth and stop there, or there'll be something coming to him on more counts than one. I've got you all marked, boys, mind that. There's George Harker covered at the railroad, and an eye on the trail just wherever it served your business up to now. There won't be no more pack horses at the coulée, so I give you warning, fair and square, to cut out the game.

"You made a run ten nights ago. Seems likely from the look of things this morning you'll be busy enough right here not to fix up another for a bit. But if you do, and we catch you at it, there'll be a spell in penitentiary for Walt and others as I won't mention now."

He levelled a deterrent eye here and there, and then, with a change of manner, fell back a step and took Bob by the elbow.

"This young man," he said, presenting him, "is just out from the Old Country. His name is Robert Quested. I've brought him straight along with me to teach school up here on Arrow Creek. It's up to you, boys,

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to give him a fair show with the kids, and treat him like a white man. You'll find him quite an asset round this burgh."

"And now," clapping on his stetson, "I'd better leave you to it, and hit the grit again myself."

Bob was thankful to be thus let off.

He met the trappers' non-committal scrutiny with a boyish frankness.

"It's jolly new to me—all this," he said, as one or two shouldered forward for a friendly word or a "shake," "but I've a notion I can wield a billhook or an axe, and that looks like the first job you fellows will pile on to me. Who's the boss of the fire fighters? He's got to count me in."

A lantern-jawed man called Matthews eyed the boy as if he doubted his being of much use.

"I guess," he observed laconically, "we'll be needin' all the help we can get, come presently. Ever cleared bush?" and spat carelessly to mark indifference to the answer.

"I helped to beat out quite a stretch of fire once, burning gorse, on Hayes Common," the scout replied, laughing at the remembrance of it now, "but you wouldn't think anything

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of that. I know, though, what you mean."

He was rewarded by little but a nod, and the men fell generally into the discussion of their plans for the moment. The policeman lent some weight of his own to their counsels, and was listened to without a trace of prejudice, but time pressed for him as for them all, and the only thing he had yet to do was show Bob the schoolroom—a little log building at the end of the village strung along the ridge above the river—and the jolly little cabin next it which he might thenceforth make his home.

Meanwhile, young Wally Marchant, as chief of the Opechees, had rounded his whole tribe into the woods, and was holding a war palaver in the lodge.

About forty boys and girls of all ages tried to crowd into the crazy wigwam, clamorous to devise a plan for freezing out the teacher.

Wally in the centre, an old horse blanket round his shoulders by way of buffalo robe of ceremony, shouted down the rest.

"You know what the sergeant said," he cried, "leastways, those who saw the gink last night. There's no gettin' us into the school-

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house, as he'll find out good and quick, but what are we goin' to do to make him up and quit?"

Dozens of suggestions were flung in, the fiercest of them from the squaws. Sadie, the North Star, allowed they'd see John Walt about it, and get him to take a bear alive and shut it in at night with the unwelcome stranger. Crowquill, a rascally imp, with the brightest wits among the braves, guessed a hunch of skunks would stink him out fit to beat the band; Pessaconaway, one of the whisky runner's lively brats, yelled that the muskeg was the place for Bob—they'd take him to the brink and see him sink into the swamp inch by inch before their eyes; and another bright child of the bad lands suggested the swiftest, blackest, coldest currents in the river.

Altogether, Bob was likely to fare roughly at his prospective scholars' hands, and Sergeant Ivan, noticing their significant absence from the settlement, said as much, broadly grinning, as he took leave of the scout, and cantered off in the pall.

It was indeed, "some" look-out for him. Bob turned Queenie's head and rode

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slowly back along the margin of the river.

He had got to get hold of these Arrow Creek boys and girls—fancy, the girls, too!—and knock 'em into shape; make allies of them on the right side of things, should necessity arise, and enrol them in the scouts.

Meanwhile, there was this terrific business of the forest fire.

The haze, Bob thought, was getting thicker. He scanned the wide flood of the Sakwasew and noted an eyot some distance up the bend set like an aigrette with a plume of poplar trees upon it, in the midst of a wild stretch of racing, foam-flecked rapids. The trappers had been debating how to reach it to cut the herbage down in case the blaze came from the south and threatened to jump the river. The clump was inaccessible from the flats below the creek, or, as far as Bob could see, from any point at all.

He reined up the pony, and dismounted, revolving the problem of the eyot in the light of all he knew of rocket practice. He had some fathoms of light line coiled upon the saddle at his knee, and resolved upon a throw or two in case anything of the sort might

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possibly be rigged to enable a man to get across with a hatchet.

He began a calculation. He took careful note, first, of the white mast of the central tree, and threw his hat down on the sand directly in line with it this side. Turning, he paced along the bank for fifty yards, grooved a mark there with his heel, and sought a bit of driftwood to stick upright in it. Then he went on again carefully stepping it out in the same direction for another twenty-five yards, and marked the end of this with a stone. But at that point he turned his back directly to the river, and walked ahead at dead right angles to his former line, till he came to a point where he got the peg of driftwood in a direct line with the poplar on the island. The distance from here back to the stone gave him half the breadth of the river at the spot where he had left his hat—200 yards.

Bob was now able to estimate the throw. He started back for Queenie and his hat, but stared round, when he got there, in astonishment, for the pony was nowhere to be seen; she had vanished, and her trail upon the sand gave out at the shelf of beach which let up into the forest beyond.

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She had evidently been led off, for a number of footmarks trampled the river's edge.

Bob might find himself at a loss when it came to "tracking" in the wood, all the conditions were so stern, and real, but, nothing daunted, he plunged into the hazy gloom.

Next minute, something struck him violently at the back of the knees, and he went down whack on the back of his head. Instantly a gleeful din arose, of shouts and derisive laughter. A rough pair of hands—a man's hands—gripped him in a vice, and someone whipped a handkerchief as a bandage over his eyes, and stuffed a gag into his mouth.

He seemed to have a cloud of enemies about him, but one antagonist in chief, the man who issued orders, and who whipped a line about his arms, trussed him up like some miserable plucked fowl.

Next moment he was hoisted to the saddle wrong way round, and bound upon the pony's back by a lashing round his ankles. There were roars of laughter, and a score of childish voices jibed at him, while the man, whipping the bandage from his eyes, shouted to Wally Marchant to let the pinto go.

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Someone brought a quirt down slash across her quarters and with a snort of pain and terror she sprang forward like an arrow from a bow, Bob hanging helplessly over her tail. For a hideous second he felt he must slew round and under, to have his brains dashed out upon the ground. Every power he had of mind and soul and body was keyed up to preserve his grip, his wits and balance.

Queenie was going like the wind. His head sang and the line cut cruelly about his chest and arms. How he stuck he never knew ; how long it was before she stumbled and came down he had only the nightmare of an idea. The pony put her foot into a hole, and the helpless sack of him, roped to her back, was beaten like a flail upon the ground. Agonising pains swept through the leg on which she rolled.

When the little creature scrambled, trembling, to her feet, the boy hung upside down.

But her wild career was over ; she struggled—panting and sweating—and stood drooping on the spot.

The gag had fortunately slipped from Bob's mouth. He knew it was all up with him if

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Queenie failed him now. But an idea had shot into his head ; he called to her, gasping, choking ; called her name, remembered a trick of hers, and a fond play word.

"Roll, Queenie, girl! Fire! Roll over! . . . Queenie—Queenie, roll!"

Instantly she slid upon her haunches, and he felt her round flank heave. The pretty head, he knew, lay outstretched upon the sod. He fell heavily as before, ploughing a furrow with his shoulder as he went. His senses reeled, and all but left him, but came sharply back when the line across his forearm suddenly gave way and burst asunder. Blood was wetting all his sleeve ; a gash somewhere seared his flesh.

His bludgeoned wits awoke.

He realised there must be something sharp in the ground just where he had fallen. The cord had been cut through. If he could only get upon the thing again—whatever it might be—where his bonds still held, something might be done!

He hauled his body along an inch or so, and caught sight of a gleaming edge of jagged steel beneath him. He worked a cord into position over it and tried to fret it to and

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for, when, to his enormous joy, it burst. Bob had attained some measure of release, for his arms could now be wangled free.

But a trapper's knots are firm as any sailor's, and if the scout had been less practised at the things that can be done with line and lashings, he might have failed yet to extricate himself from John Walt's tying up.

When he got his ankles clear the question still remained as to whether the leg upon which Queenie had twice rolled was merely crushed or broken. It was numb; Bob found it impossible to stand. He felt himself all over, and wondered what more was going to happen before the West licked him into shape!

Queenie, too, was lame. She struggled to her feet when he roused and called her and finally helped to drag him up as well. She looked round at him and nuzzled him all over as if she understood and sympathised.

Bob hung on one foot, afraid yet to trust the other. He picked up the bit of broken trap that had practically saved his life, and looked curiously at it.

Then he flung it from him—it was a heavy,

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useless thing—into a greenish-looking patch of sod near by.

It gave a queer, soggy wheeze, not like a hit or plop, and slowly sank. All the green surface trembled; it broke where the trap fell into a mouth of rank black slime.

Bob stared as it sank, with a strange sense of horror. Then he took a keen survey all around, and recalled with rising hair Sergeant Ivan's tales upon the trail of the awful muskeg at the Creek.

The forest loomed black and mysterious as ever at his back, but between him and some shining thread far off, which might have been the river, the flats had opened out into an extraordinary evil-looking plain. It was level as a lake, wickedly green, with areas in it of amber, stagnant water, full of a plant the Indians call mermaid hair. Here and there were ridges of moss and sand overgrown with a coarse and flinty-looking grass and musk-rat reed.

This was the Arrow muskeg—a thin crust of earth over unknown depths of reeking bog, traversed, Bob remembered, by a single trail of solid ground known only to the few. Elsewhere it would not bear the pressure of a

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man's foot without trembling and breaking through.

It was fortunate for him, indeed, that Queenie had fallen on its brink; otherwise both he and she had gone down and stifled in the keg!

Whoever had been responsible for the rough trick played upon him—and Bob deemed it nothing but the prank of the boys and girls, who had no use for school—he could not credit it that the people at the settlement would have sent him—or anyone—to such a death.

He swung the pony's head round, tied her fetlock tightly up, and, clambering somehow to the saddle, picked a dubious way back.

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CHAPTER IX.

THE TORCH IN THE SAKWASEW.

At ten o'clock that night the whole hillside across the river was ablaze, a roaring forest of flame.

The heat and smoke of it drove across the valley, blotting out with furnace breath the sight of the ranks of resinous trees that flared like torches, and came crashing down in the blackness and reek, showering blazing branches on the wind to blow ahead and set light to everything before them.

The whose settlement was out and down upon the flats. Once the fire jumped the river nothing could save the village strung along the base of the hillside opposite. Showers of sparks drove across the rapids; at any moment the trees and scrub upon the eyot

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might catch alight, and thence the conflagration would leap into the northern woods.

It was a scene of desperation. Women shrieked, and drove the children dangerously deep into the water ; men strove with might and main to drive a course athwart the rapids in canoes, which went sweeping downstream broadside on, and oversetting amid the rocks like straws upon a millrace. Cries rose upon the awful diapason of the roaring forest, that Louis, Michael, and Tom Arlene had been drowned. . . .

Bob Quested, red-eyed, and blackened with the acrid smoke, but strung up to fighting pitch, forced his way to the fire boss's side.

"Get a line across," he shouted, "and shoot the rapids from above. Let me go in the canoe, and catch on as we pass. I might manage to land."

Matthews gave the boy one keen, incredulous glance, then scattered the group of men about him with a volley of quick-firing orders. Someone thrust an axe into Bob's hands, and he found himself tearing off along the river bank in the wake of two fellows with a light canoe, just as a rope,

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whirled round Peter Marchant's head, shot out over the river. Once, twice, thrice, it fell slack, and had to be hauled in. The wind was dead against it, and the smoke baffled any aim.

Then a boy came, breathless, with word that it had caught, but dad said "Quested would be sliced upon it like cheese upon a wire."

Wally's face lit up with sudden hero worship as the canoe shot from the bank, the English boy, braced tense with purpose and expectancy right amidships, between one set-faced paddler kneeling in the bow, and another at the stern, striving to hold the frail craft head-on in the welter of the lashing, tearing, racing rapids.

Down shot the canoe, and a second or so later Bob found himself hanging across the rope, caught like a flimsy rag, every breath of wind shocked out of him. The water foamed and lashed about his legs, but he felt a boulder beneath one foot, prized his toes against it and flung himself to one side, no longer to overhang the awful slide between it and the next, down which the canoe had shot from under him.

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Holding tight to the line, the boy scrambled somehow across the rapids, now swinging between life and death, now actually crawling on the rocks. The handle of his axe was tightly gripped against his body by his belt, and his greatest fear, working towards the eyot in that delirious flood, was lest it slip and drop into the river, for upon that axe the salvation of the Creek depended.

Just as the boy crawled ashore, breathless, dripping, bleeding, the topmost bough of one of the willowy poplars caught alight. In a very few minutes more the whole eyot would be blazing—a torch to fire the entire north bank of the river.

Bob was on his feet, nerved with the courage of immense emergency, slicing great V-shaped wedges into those three slim but stubborn trunks, so that he could hack and hack, and hack again, and bring them toppling, crashing down, to quench like torches in the water. All the scrub and bush about him was alight before the third tree fell, but a quick glance showed him no burning boughs or fragments of them had reached the northern shore—or none which the watchers there had not been able to beat out, as they came

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hurtling over. The smaller stuff would not suffice to carry across the rapids; the eyot might blaze now with impunity, and stand, fire-swept in the river, like a blackened patch of heath. Only he himself must escape, somehow, before it was too late, and the island end of the life line burn through against the rock where it had caught.

It was an awful ordeal to try to recross those racing steppes of maddened water with no firmer guide or hold than this; it was like trusting to a thread of cotton for handrail across a cataract, and there were chasms between the rocks, where the water, in any one of which, catching his feet, would drag him down to instant death with its resistless force and speed.

Bob came to one of these and saw he could not hope to traverse it. He got the line across his chest, gripped under with both his arms, and hung upon it for one second more, nerveless, helpless, less power in him left than had he been a piece of broken jetsam. Next minute he must have let go and dropped.

Something upstream came darting down like a leaf upon a watershoot. In a flash it

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was through the channel, and half-a-mile farther down the river, Bob found himself lying in the bottom of a canoe with a boy crouching over him crying out that he was dead. . . .

They turned the light craft's nose and drove her with a sweep or two into the bank. Then four pairs of arms lifted the scout out and laid him gently as might be upon the sand.

"You stop here," he heard a man give order, "and don't stir from his side. He may be hurt more than we think for; wait till we can rig a stretcher and come back."

Their footsteps had hardly died away though, before Bob made shift to prop himself upon an elbow, dazed and bruised, and throw a dazed look at his companion. It was Wally Marchant, the Chief of the Opechees, who squatted close beside him, scarcely daring to believe his eyes.

"Oh, say, then you ain't quite dead!" he cried; "I was scared stiff you was!"

"The fire," Bob muttered, "has it got across?" and made a weak grab at the boy, falling upon his face.

"No! Sure it hain't—and sure it won't,

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not now. Lift up, mister, let me help you up."

Wally lugged Bob by the shoulders, and prized a knee into his back. The exhausted fellow fell forward slackly, and let his hands lie prone, just as he sat, both legs outstretched before him. The great chief came round and peered with extraordinary anxiety into the other's scarred and weary face.

"Say," he begged, "you ain't going to send in your checks? I'd do 'most anything to help you—to make up. Mister, I'm real sorry we corralled you and bound you on your plug. You've sure saved the settlement to-night."

Bob looked at him; slowly a grin dawned in his dragged mouth, and in his smoke-reddened eyes. He put out a leaden hand.

"Shake, old boy," he said; "I imagine you've made up for playing that trick. Was it you thought of picking me off the line?"

"Me and the others," Wally returned; "you could never have got back that way. It was up to us to see you made it somehow." He put a wiry little paw into Bob's hand and wrenched it. "I'd like to feel you hadn't got no kick coming about that ride. All the tribe

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will feel about as mean as me after what you've done."

"Tell 'em not to, then. Tell 'em I'm all right."

Bob made an effort, and got sideways to his knees.

"Where's your mud-hook, Wally? Help me up."

Finally, with the chief's ineffectual assistance, he stood upon his feet, one hand clinging to the bony little shoulder which shoved itself to his support.

"You and I, Chief, have got to be friends," Bob said, "for it's on your account I'm here. Is it a deal?"

"Sure thing," returned the factor's son, "and I'll answer for the tribe—the braves, anyway; I don't quite know about the squaws. You'll have to nobble Sadie. You goin' to try to walk?"

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CHAPTER X.

BOB IS TAKEN CAPTIVE.

Arrow Creek Settlement was saved; for the fire, thanks to Bob's action, failed to cross the Sakwasew.

It burnt itself out along the southern bank, and when the wind changed, later, and died down, nothing remained of the forest there but areas of black desolation littered over with charred and fallen trunks, like spillikins.

Quested would have been something like the hero of the hour were the trappers and woodsmen of the far North-West easily stirred by deeds of valour; but such deeds with them are far too commonplace.

They allowed, with cordiality, that he was "some smart guy," and would have stood

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him drinks with a primitive hospitality, and only laughed good-humouredly when he stuck to it that he liked a brew of Ma Marchant's coffee a jolly sight better.

Thenceforth Bob, indeed, had the freedom of the Creek. Marchant was pleased to yarn with him about his peltries in the factory, and the creatures in the woods, and to have him come in with the others of an evening to sit and "chew the rag" of local gossip round the stove. But one and all the parents of the place left him to make headway with the youngsters best he might.

The thing that pleased Bob most was that the very morning after his exploit in the river, the whole of Wally's Indian tribe, the fearsome Opechees, came straggling down towards the schoolhouse, or rather towards his hut.

The boys and girls of Arrow Creek were shamefaced, so they straggled.

They found, however, like their elders, that this Quested "had something to him," and wanted to make amends. For all the hardihood of the trick they had played him yesterday—and Black Walt it had been who came to the rescue of their counsels—none

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of the tribe had meant to head the pony for the keg ; nor, perhaps, had the man himself designed to go so far, although he had a shrewd idea that the newcomer's presence in the Creek portended more than appeared upon the surface, and would have been glad to find him a quitter. In any case, the cayuse would have stopped dead on the brink of the quaking bog.

Wally Marchant's word went with the Opechees, and he declared Bob Quested was a "go." The braves and squaws had no option but to play up after that ; so they made tracks willingly enough, but in demoralised formation, for the schoolhouse, in the morning.

The great chief, a sturdily-built boy, with eyes bright and black as a chipmunk's, had been quick to recognise a leader in this young English boss with the bonny air of comradeship which Sergeant Ivan had plumped upon their necks. He went over to Bob with one loyal bound, after the exploit in the river, and meant to carry the whole tribe along. He had been willing to act as scapegrace for the lot about the Mazeppa ride, but Quested quashed the subject then and there when

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they swore friendship overnight down on the flats.

All that worried Wally now was the remembrance of John Walt.

He wished the trapper hadn't had a hand in things.

Bob was finding himself at all sorts of odd disadvantage over his first meal, and getting "fixed" in general in his new log hut.

He was struggling with a smoky stove, wondering how in thunder you regulated the two dampers, when the Opechee broke in upon him with scant ceremony and took the business over.

Wally Marchant lugged along a goat, and, proceeding to tether her beside the open door with mallet, rope and peg, shouted that she'd come to stop. She'd "let her milk down easy" for the school boss "if he knew enough to treat her right."

Crowquill, alias Alec Urquhart, who was practically second in the chief's patrol, crooked a skinny arm into Bob's fire-box and hooked his kindling out.

"Gee! You ain't begun with pine chips at the bottom," he discovered, "and your billets ain't been dried out good and fit.

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Soon's I get this goin' I'll split you up some logs, and you can pile 'em in the oven."

A hatchet-faced little fellow, with an infectious grin, yelled for a billycan of water to pour in atop of the pump. "It ain't broke," he declared, "it only needs to start—and keep going till the water comes."

Sam Pickles and Billy Speed, two more redoubtable braves, brought armfuls of spruce boughs, and showed Bob how to stow and pack them in for bedding under the army blankets in his bunk.

Half-a-dozen or more youngsters came from the store, loaded with canned "eats," and every woman in the village had sent something for Bob's larder, a pickling of pork, a batch of bread, a tin of berries, and a positive array of cakes.

They buzzed, these trapper children, like scouts the first day in camp, and filled the place with cheery noise. It made the ex-patrol leader of the Golden Eagles feel more at home than he had done since leaving Frensham, and instinctively he caught hold.

All the boys and girls in Arrow Creek had swarmed in on him for a sort 'of housewarming, and for a while they set the pace for

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Bob. Everybody seemed to find something clamorous and handy to be done.

He liked the look of these young shavers in torn corduroy, jean overalls, and sweaters, and of the girls in bright check gingham and coats with heavy furs. They were keen and gay, and talked a racy jargon soon to come as naturally to himself, it suited life and things up here so well.

Sadie Marchant, the chief squaw, was a jolly, pretty girl, with black eyes full of mischief, and a roguish mouth. She towed around with her a little satellite called Hazel, with a face exactly like a flower, and long, fair hair always in a "snarl." Hazel lugged along a dressed-up thing she called a doll, and wanted Bob to declare he thought it "dandy." It was nothing but a billet of slim, unpeeled poplar, with a woolly bonnet and a dress, and a face drawn in ink upon the chalk-white bark.

Hazel displayed it with immense tenderness and pride, and the embarrassed scout, wanting to do the right thing, called it "topping." Whereupon Hazel turned a doubtful shoulder on him, and relapsed into a little sulk.

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Someone raised the hue and cry that the bacon had caught fire. Sadie sailed into it and took hold, clearing everybody from the stove, and Bob, bundling out the intrusive goat (with due acknowledgments), slung all the edibles upon the table, calling for a whip round for mugs and spoons and plates.

They'd have a grand old feed, and celebrate ! It was a riotous proceeding, and went off like hot cakes.

Then Bob stood up and made a speech, and Wally yelled for order.

" Oh, Most Impassible of all the Rockies—and Fixedest of All the Stars," with a laughing bow to Sadie, munching doughnuts ; " I humbly crave admission to the tribe. I, too, am a great scout in my own country, but the Golden Eagles, over whom I ruled, paint their faces with the clay, being nowhere in comparison with the fierce and glorious Opechees. (Though why Opechees I can't make out. I should have thought Kahgahgees had suited better.) " Bob groped wildly for every tag and line of Hiawatha he could possibly remember. " You know the Great Spirit plumped me down upon you yesterday "—Bob was not irreverent ; he

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meant the sergeant, " to show how lines like that *////* are rain, and wavy ones, like *~~~~~* that, are water. Don't you know how—

*Hiawatha, walking
In the solitary forest,
Pondering, musing in the forest
Took his paints of different colours,
On the smooth bark of the birch tree
Painted many shapes and figures,
And each figure had a meaning
For the earth he drew a straight line,
For the sky a bow above it ;
White the space between for daytime,
Filled with little stars for night-time ;
On the left a point for sunrise,
On the right a point for sunset,
On the top a point for noontide,
And for rain and cloudy weather
Waving lines descending from it.*

" Hiawatha was a corking person ; I could tell you reams and reams of what he did, and we are going to do it, too, and more. I have the 'medicine' they don't teach in schools, but the 'medicine' he taught. I come from the Great Chief Scout, and have crossed the Gitchee Gume, the big sea water,

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like the strange pale-face of old, to bring it to my brothers on the Sakwasew.

"You must initiate me into your most secret mysteries, and I'll initiate you into mine. If you could possibly dispense with the accustomed ceremonies of the torture to see if I can stick 'em, I should be glad to compound with the knockabout of yesterday. But we won't cut out the smoking of the calumet, the peace pipe,"—he produced the fag end of a cigarette and stuck it in a little holder of black Whitby jet; "let's have one whiff all round.

"What I propose to do is this; to pow-wow in the forest when we feel like it" (he meant read and write and cipher; he meant the law, the signs, and the salute), "and to go tracking when we don't! Can't we have a war-dance—I mean grand parade—in full marching order, paint and feathers, and great 'belts of wampum' in moccasins and beads?"

They could, of course, and broke up yelling acclamations to go and fetch all the trappings that they owned.

* * * * *

Bob got hold of the Arrow Creek children—boys and girls alike—in no time at all.

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They capitulated, unawares, to "school," and were keen enough to learn to read when it led direct to flag-wagging. The tribe, indeed, needed but a touch to resolve into a troop! But herein Bob might have been faced with a considerable difficulty.

How could he administer the Promise to a pack of boys and girls, every one of whom, presumably, knew the secret of the Creek? How was he to enlist them on his side when it was his business to discover that secret, but no part of his design to profit by tale-bearing, or any act of treachery?

Bob had not been "teaching school" for long before he found that the two Walt brothers were the moving spirits in the smuggling game; and both of them "had it in" for him. If any others of the settlers at the Creek suspected Sergeant Ivan's nominee of an ulterior purpose in their midst, perhaps they were not much concerned.

Wally Marchant was the first to tumble to Bob's difficulty.

The two of them had become firm chums and had been on long tracking expeditions together through the forest. Wally knew such an amazing lot of "woodcraft," and was

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such an expert in the habits of the creatures of the wild, Bob felt he had almost as much to learn from him as he had to impart.

Wally was sitting in Bob's hut one night, rubbing cariboo hide with soap and grease to make into a leathern shirt, when he suddenly demanded how long the latter meant to wait before he let him—Wally Marchant, Phil and Sam Hislop, the Pickles bunch of braves and the Hemcroff boys pass the first scout test. This game of playing Indians was a washout compared to being scouts.

Bob levelled such a thoughtful look upon him in reply that the latter rather squirmed.

"Say, Walter," Bob began doubtfully, whittling away at a doll he was trying to carve for Hazel Dandson, "you know the agent has been in town to-day, kicking up the dickens of a row at the post? He says there's whisky crossing the river every night—that your father's got to get busy soon and stop it, or he'll raise Cain with the police."

"I know it," the chief returned; "I was there when he blew in."

"Well, your dad's a white man, and so are you. How long's this business going on?"

"Long as John and Black can get away

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with it I guess. Long as it pays a few of 'em to lend a hand to run the stuff." Wally looked up so ingenuously, Bob was frankly puzzled.

"I should have thought," he said, "a man in your father's position here would have been keen to put the traffic down. I can't understand—if he isn't in it, and that's unthinkable—why he don't get busy and do something."

"Dad can't do no more than the police," Wally returned, "and Sergeant Ivan said himself he knows the men. It's up to him to catch 'em on the run. 'Tain't up to dad, or anybody here, to shove an oar in unless they know where the stuff is hid. Only one or two even, of the band, knows that, you bet your life, and they keeps their heads shut good and close."

"Do you mean to say it isn't generally known? That every man Jack and kid around the Creek don't know?"

"Sure thing," cried Walter, "or maybe we'd have it in for John and Black ourselves. It's hid, and hid where no one's ever know—except them two, perhaps. 'Tain't as if we haven't looked, on the quiet, but it ain't

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no use kickin' up a shine until you're ready. Sergeant Ivan, he don't credit but what the whole Creek's in it. Nor the agent, neither. But I'm just tellin' you, I am—— ”

All this was sheer revelation to Bob Qusted.

He pitched Belinka, the unfinished doll, into a corner, and gave Wally a resounding slap upon the back.

“ Chief,” he said, “ we'll have a grand pow-wow to-morrow, and swear in the troop.”

* * * * *

Now that the enlisting of his scouts and the organising of patrols on active service would not involve the braves of Arrow Creek in any sort of awkward dilemma, Bob could go right ahead.

He could understand that the trappers were not particularly keen to get themselves embroiled with a bully of the type of Black Walt, nor to waste their time meddling in an affair they preferred not to regard as theirs. There was a little knot of awkward fellows at the far end of the settlement who foregathered with the Walts—half-breeds, like themselves—but it seemed to be an open ques-

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tion how far they were in their leader's confidence.

Wally Marchant glowed with high anticipation. He was the very one to play right-hand man to Bob, and had looked forward to the formation of the troop with a natural-born leader's instinct. They fell to the discussion of the patrols, and Qusted revealed to Wally all that he had been trying to do hitherto on his own.

"They're all fine chaps," he said, "but it's you, of course, I want."

At first, Bob saw little for it, up in the backwoods of the Sakwasew but to enrol boys and girls alike. The latter were just as keen as the former, and Sadie Marchant scouted with high disdain those awkward distinctions and limitations as to sex, which seemed to make the idea of "mixed patrols" a highly fantastic one. Lacking a guider, Bob decided to let her make the Promise with the boys, and admit her to all the activities and exercises of the troop until he should have initiated her into the true scout and guide idea, when she could organise the girls herself.

Long before this was accomplished to

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young Quested's satisfaction, however, Sadie Marchant's enthusiastic following had taken matters into their own hands and copied all the others did, just as the girls in England copied the first scouts, off their own splendid little bats.

So that, in a fortnight's time, the forty odd youngsters at the settlement, divided into a troop and company under Bob and Sadie, respectively, numbered four patrols in the one, and three in the other. They called themselves the First and Second Arrow Creeks, and fashioned wonderful shoulder knots of hide soft as velvet cut into ribbon strips, and worked with beads by the girls.

In Bob's troop there were the Opechees to start with (the Robins) to preserve the afore-said Indian name, with Wally as patrol leader, and Alec Urquhart as his second. Then came the Ravens, the Kahgahgees; the Sun-fishes, the Ugudwashes; and the "Great Bear of the Mountains, the terror of the nations," the Mishe-Mokwas.

And the girls chose to be known as the Blue Birds, the Owaissas; the Wild Geese, the Wawas; and the Swallows, the Shawshaws.

They had the schoolhouse for headquarters,

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and set to work to learn to write and read, fired by two passages, one by Longfellow, and the other by Sir Robert Baden Powell, which meant exactly the same thing :

*Face to face we speak together,
But we cannot speak when absent,
Cannot send our voices from us
To the friends that dwell afar off ;
Cannot send a secret message,
But the bearer learns our secret,
May pervert it, may betray it,
May reveal it unto others.*

"Once you can send and read letters in Morse, by dots and dashes, you can try it in other ways—by flashlight, or with the flags, or by whistle."

All this was most exciting. It led to "signs," and from "Ac" to "Vic!" and the boys and girls of Arrow Creek fell, round the camp fire, on a battered copy of *Ivanhoe* before school had been started up a month.

And in his turn, Bob began to learn a thousand things you won't find in the scouting manuals at home. Walter Marchant showed him how you shear and soak and

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grease and beat buckskin, and then stretch and pull it and smoke it in the burning "punk" of a rotten tree, to make it brown and soft as down for moccasins and shirts.

And Sam Pickles initiated him into the mysteries of snow-shoe making from frames of ash or birch, or *mackikwatick*, the pliant tamarack.

There was an awful lot to learn about the snow-shoe: the shape of it, and the make, denoting the country that the trapper used. The oval or broad shoe, with but a slight toe curve, came from forested, rocky and hummocky land, where speed had been impossible; but the long, curved, narrow shoes, with rear ends smooth enough on the runners for the hunter to sit down and coast downhill as on a toboggan, came from the wide, free-flying levels of the prairie land. Padding for the instep meant rock ground or long runs; a filling of hide strips meant the wet, heavily-packed snow regions of the sea coast; and ties instead of a noose to hold the foot, denoted amateur workmanship.

All this absorbed the scoutmaster, as his "medicine" absorbed the scouts, but his mind was always busy, underneath the sur-

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face, with the secret business which had brought him to the Creek.

Once Quested revealed his purpose to the factor's son, Wally was keen as mustard. The scoutmaster, it seemed, had been patrolling the river bank for some considerable time, but always at the disadvantage of his inexperience and want of knowledge of the country.

The first thing they had to do, young Marchant suggested, was to dispense with Queenie's aid and get a boat instead. He'd be off and see Alec about that, and fetch one or two of the other scouts along.

The Urquharts had a handy dug-out, and a stout thing with a narrow prow, safer to handle than a canoe, if you had a new man in it. It could take the sheerest dip and mount the steepest wave crest where a rounder boat would fill and swamp; being hollowed from cottonwood, it was not liable to crack and tear among the boulders in the rapids. Crow-quill eagerly engaged to have this thing under cover of some brushwood by ten o'clock that night, when he and Sammy Pickles, using the reversible double-bladed paddles, which only the experts of the northern waters can manage,

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would take Bob and Walter upstream to a point opposite the Reservation. You couldn't reach it any other way; the keg stretched for miles between it and the fringes of Arrow Creek Woods.

Bob slung his rifle round his shoulders, and Walter loaded rations in a flour bag. They meant to spot the smugglers if they could, but, more than that, to track them whence they came, and it might be many hours before they returned to the settlement.

They crept through the village and struck into the forest, going as softly as might be, so as to come out on the river bank above the long reach of the rapids.

Everything was pitchy black, and as John and Black Walt would probably have to take the same course when they set out on their nefarious business, the boys had to avoid making the slightest sound.

Walter Marchant led the way, and it was really hard for Bob to follow. His shape merely melted into the deep gloom ahead, and not the snapping of a twig or the rustling of the pine needles underfoot served to indicate his passage. The others, too, might have dropped out of the trail, so soundless was

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their following. Bob felt he himself went crashing forward like a bull in a china shop.

He had no idea where Wally Marchant led, but recognised the river through the trees at last. It gleamed in the bright moonlight like a broad silver road. The scouts came down upon it at a point high above the rapids where they swept past Arrow Creek, and Alec, waiting for them there, reported nothing had been seen upon the river. If the whisky runners meant to cross to the other side to-night they had either gone ahead or would be coming later.

Alec in the prow, and Sammy Pickles in the stern, swept the dug-out straight into mid-stream. A long tract of rough water there, above a bed of rock and shingle, might serve for nearly a couple of miles to mask the small black blot of the boat in its white and silvern turmoil.

After that, they shot under the shadow of the northern bank and paddled on, silently as ever, uttering not so much as a single word.

Impenetrable blackness veiled the southern bank of the Sakwasew ; night brooded over the dreary desolation of the ruined forest.

BOB QUESTED'S TROOP

All was dark and empty on the northern shore where the beginnings of the illimitable keg ran, a wedge of reeking bog, between the cold, swift current of the river and the widely-receding fringe of pine forest beyond.

They were making for a point almost opposite the confines of the Reservation, some miles back of the river, where a ridge of rocky ground marked the limit of that part of the recent conflagration. This was the Much-I-Do Cliff, as named by the Black-foot chief who once escaped pursuit that way when the savage Crees were on his trail.

Here, if anywhere, John and Black must take the shore and land their contraband.

The boys went more cautiously than ever, for at this point they had not merely the breeds to elude, but the infinitely more cunning pure blood opposite, who might be waiting for the goods.

The dug-out merely dawdled, hidden under the black fringes of the musk-rat weed, like a bit of driftwood where the current swept beside the marsh. It was impossible to hear or detect the slightest movement anywhere.

Bob looked at the bright northern stars as a relief from peering into the elusive dark-

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ness with every untrained sense keenly on the alert. Whether or not his companions detected anything he could not say ; but he trusted them with the enormous respect of the city-bred, artificially primed hunter, when he finds himself in company with the children of the wild. All his "scouting" went for nothing compared to that of these young whites on the Creek. But they, perhaps, looked to him for the leadership which had organised this expedition.

The scout and his three companions lay in wait hour after hour without a sign or movement. But nothing rewarded their tense vigil. No speck appeared upon the river, no paddle broke the shining mirror of its swiftly-moving surface.

The sentient night drew on. It wore eventlessly away. Only the weird cry of a loon, just as that pallor came which heralded the dawn, broke the long watch of the weary four. When the light stole over the scene a mist rose from the river like a faint, smoky exhalation. It flaunted across the rampart of the Much-I-Do, like banners, and drew trailing skirts over the sinister reaches of the keg. And again came that melancholy cry.

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Suddenly a slight noise near at hand pricked Bob's flagging vigilance.

What was that? The plop of a rat or beaver in the swamps?

Next minute a canoe shot suddenly right across their bows, coming from out the reeds, and the two men in her, with a deft turn of the paddles fore and aft, rushed her alongside in a flash.

Bob flung his rifle to his shoulder on the instant, but went hurtling back as Black Walt, with a curse, sprang upon him, almost upsetting the boats.

The two crashed backwards, while John made a wild lunge for the next man aft—Walter Marchant, who struck out stolidly with a paddle. Sam caught at the canoe just as it went over, and hung to it by the nose when it swung round and threatened to break away downstream.

For the next few minutes all was wild confusion. It seemed a toss-up whether the boys would first be drowned or captured. They put up a spirited fight, but Black had Bob bound in the bottom of the boat in no time, and could help fling the other three off John with a single wrest of his powerful wrist.

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One by one the smaller fry were bundled neck and crop into the canoe, and shoved off downstream with a curse or a laugh, free, but helpless, until a single paddle was sent deftly spinning after them. Sam contrived to retrieve it somehow, but by that time the boats were widely parted, and the dug-out had mysteriously disappeared.

Bob remained in his captors' hands, bound, lying in the bottom, and only knew that he was in their power and the keg was close at hand.

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CHAPTER XI.

THE SECRET OF THE KEG.

Bob had not been knocked insensible, and his wits were keenly alive as he lay in the dug-out wondering what would happen next.

From the half-careless, half-savage amusement of the two men he gathered that his companions had been manhandled just a bit and set adrift; but from the way they kicked him, getting to their stations fore and aft, argued a grimmer fate in store for himself. Black Walt, however, turned his head and grinned, and again Bob caught that flash of strong white teeth he had seen upon the trail when the quirt stung Ladybird and stampeded Fairbanks's team.

He had no notion where they might be going, but could only imagine it was up or down the river. Neither John nor Black had

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much to say after the first interchange of guttural satisfaction that they had secured Bob. They spoke a queer lingo of their own, half-Cree, half-French, and the boy gave up any attempt to understand it. He was desperately thirsty and consumed with regret at the undignified way his rifle had been twisted from his hands and flung overboard.

Moreover, the patrol had found out no more by the adventures of the night than was already known, namely, that the two brothers were the purveyors of the whisky to the Reservation. But whether they had carried out their purpose again during the last few hours, it was impossible to say. Bob tried to think it out. How had the men turned up, suddenly, in their canoe without the slightest warning, and many hours after the patrol had been wakefully watching every inch of the moonlit river? Where had they come from, and how had they been able to drop upon the waters so silently and swiftly? He could make nothing of it; except that the only sound heard all night long was that weird cry of the loon. Could that have been a signal, and no bird after all?

The boat seemed to have been going on

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for some considerable time, and then, to Bob's astonishment, he found the men were dropping the paddles and poling her along by means of the short staves they had carried in their belts.

She must have struck upon a shelf of sand or mud ; the conjecture seemed a likely one, for presently the captive saw the musk-rat weed again towering above the side. Then they bumped and stuck, and Black roughly dragged Bob to his feet.

The boy stared around him with something like a cold access of dismay.

The boat seemed to have been paddling in slack water, so slack you could dip your hand into it, and fail to tell the way the current ran, and now Bob understood.

They had turned off from the river and left it far behind. They had traversed a long, winding " lead " in the tea-coloured waters of the swamp, and had struck into the heart of that quaking desolation upon whose awful brink Queenie had stumbled and fallen after his wild Mazeppa ride.

Such a tangle of reeds and brushwood and rank grass Bob had never imagined in all his life. A red fox came peeping from a

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thicket, sniffed the air, and decided to de-camp. Musk-rats gnawed at the bulbs of some tufted clumps of weed ahead, and a crowd of little "kits" appeared swimming in the pool on whose marge the boat had grounded.

With a cry as if she shrieked "Leg it! leg it! leg it!" the old duck flung herself after them, dipped, dived, and came up again alongside the dug-out, flopping about as if broken winged, almost near enough to be caught by hand. John Walt let fly at her with his staff, but she dived again adroitly, only to reappear and repeat her antics until the brood scuttled off to safety.

But neither of the men were out for sport. Black Walt turned to Bob, and swept an arm around to indicate the scene.

"All mud," he said, "all swamp and bog. We get out here and walk. I blindfold you. If you no keep tight hold, you sink and drown or go deep into the keg."

"What do you mean to do with me?" the boy demanded; "what's your game?" and would have resisted had his arms not been tightly bound. The other fellow had a kerchief across his eyes next minute, knotted round

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his head, and between the two of them they forced him overside.

Bob's feet sank deep into the slime. He nearly pitched upon his face, as if someone grasped and held his ankles. But the others came as well, their feet squelching on in front and to the rear of him, and John unbound his wrists. He lifted Bob's arm and laid his hand upon the shoulder of Black, in front.

"You move," he said, "as he moves, or you die."

The situation was so fraught with horror, Bob had no option but to obey, literally blindly. Every step he took, guided between the two breeds, was fraught with a fear that raised the hair upon his head. Sometimes it seemed there was no footing where they led, the slime gave in all directions, but what forced him on was, if he halted for an instant, or raised a hand to free his eyes, their threat to abandon him then and there.

Sometimes his foot felt a tussock of grass beneath it, sometimes a crust that shook and trembled, or actually broke when his weight came full upon it, but for the most part they seemed to be walking in single file in slime, so the only chance was to keep on sharply

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as might be lest they sank right in. A man in boots would have had no chance at all. Bob, like his captors, was wearing moccasins.

Everywhere mud clung, or water lapped, or the treacherous surface trembled like a jelly. How long they threaded this awful trail across the bog, Bob had no idea; it seemed to twist and turn and double back upon itself, and even to give out in places, for the brothers halted every now and then, and had confabulations and seemed to be casting about for a foothold at a hopeless end. There was no jumping from point to point upon the swamp; only the most gingerly tread, like a cat upon hot bricks, would thread that fearsome wilderness.

They seemed to hang about and hesitate, and then go on again, sometimes doubting, sometimes confident, for hours!

Bob's courage was at its lowest ebb, but somehow he still kept on, and bit his lips to still their trembling. Sweat poured from him all over, and a chilly air sweeping over the muskeg made him shiver like a leaf.

Then at last they stopped. John Walt twisted the bandage from his eyes, and Black Walt shook off his hand.

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They had reached the heart of nowhere. The morass extended, flat and sinister, in every direction. They stood upon a sort of plate of crust, huddled close together, beyond which it seemed it was impossible to find another step. Reeds and willows grew rankly in the mud. The ground cracked where the three men stood, quaked, and seemed about to open. A horrible smell of vegetable rottenness exuded from it like a miasma.

John and Black seemed unwilling to linger there, or waste further time. But what they meant by their next action Bob could not conceive.

They reached into the scrub and bushes, hacking armfuls of them down, piling them loosely on the ground. Then the elder man turned to Bob.

"Take off your coat," he said, "and see me, what I do."

The boy obeyed.

Black spread the coat wide upon the bed of reeds and willows.

"Your raft," he said, with a cruel gleam of those white teeth, "for when the keg he gape."

The two men laughed and made to move

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away, and the boy realised they meant to leave him—marooned, stranded, in the muskeg !

He sprang after the two figures, cautiously picking their retreating steps, and fell wallowing in the bog, half-across the pile of brushwood which rocked like a boat. Next minute he had gathered himself together, clinging to it, realising that only their tangle of elastic stems and branches intervened between him and a frightful death.

With despairing eyes he watched the two breeds slowly picking their way back whence they had brought him to this spot. He shouted after them, time and time again, but to no sort of purpose. Not once did either man so much as turn his head. It was, of course, impossible for Bob to follow the trail they took. He scrambled to his feet, indeed, and started to try to do so, but while he floundered about testing the few first tentative steps, and hesitating about the next, now sinking in slime up to the calf of his leg, now drawing it back hurriedly to the firm spot his foot had just left, now marooned again upon the next, the others gained time and distance, and were soon mere figures which

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served rather to decoy than to guide him forward.

There was nothing to be done now but to regain the raft of reeds, and to sit upon it and try to watch the way they went.

It was as hopeless a task as it may be to watch people walking at a great distance on the levels of the shore or far off across the heath. You cannot precisely trace or measure their track. In this case, it was next to impossible, for the path across the bog, as Bob knew to his cost, was frightfully erratic, and the figures moved backwards and forwards so many baffling ways.

Bob Quested took his head in his hands and tried to rally all the forces he possessed. But a review of the situation was not productive of much hope.

He was dumped in a place worse than a desert island, without food or drink, or shelter, or means to help himself.

Only two facts emerged which shed a ray of consolation on his mind. One was, that he would be missed, and the other was that Sam and Alec and Walter had been sent away downstream. If the boys managed to reach the settlement in safety—which was highly

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problematical, since they had only one paddle with them—they would raise the hue and cry and know at least from what point to start the search.

Long before his weary wits beat matters out to this conclusion, John and Black had once more disappeared.

The sun was mounting in the heavens now, and Bob's thirst increased as it grew warmer. He had been awake for over thirty hours, and an intolerable weariness would have overpowered him, but for the growing anguish of this thirst. His head ached intolerably, and his eyes burnt as if filled with hot sand. He felt crushed, too, with the failure of his work, the frustration of his hopes and purposes and plans, with the silent malignity with which these two men had penetrated them and checkmated him first move!

He wondered dully, if he died there in the swamp, what would Sergeant Ivan make of it . . . when would word of his fate reach England, Frensham, and his mother!

It was not so very long ago, counting by weeks and months, since the Head had called him into the study that day in May, and told him of his father's death. Bob reviewed the

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short passage, crammed with fantastic happenings, which had intervened between that sunny summer morning and the tragic finish. Perhaps he had failed, after all, in scoutcraft, in the conduct of a man's life in these virile western lands, and deserved, somehow, to go under. He remembered a verse of Robert Service's, about how the wild had no use for the weak and the breakable, how she flung them down and aside.

The spur of it did him good. He resolved yet to make a fight off his own bat for life; and the first need was not sleep, but food and drink. He remembered the kits and muskrats on the stagnant pool coming up, and wondered if any stray creature of the waste would wander within his reach.

He crouched, watching, not daring to make the slightest movement for a long time, but nothing rewarded his patience. A hundred little creatures passed him by with inquisitive eyes and ears and whiskers, but Bob was utterly unaware of them.

And his thirst grew unendurable . . . he remembered soggy patches . . . wet places where the moisture oozed . . . spots where stagnant pools of water, dark as peat, had

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beset the treacherous trail. If only he could move about and search for one ; if only he could crawl !

An idea occurred to him. He couldn't walk, he dare not venture on his feet, but possibly he might spread-eagle on a lattice-work of the reeds and withies, and make a little progress so.

It was a most appalling job, lying on his stomach on the thin crust of the quaking mud, spreading the willows from underneath him over the next foot or so he essayed to crawl.

With an infinite risk and dread and labour Bob may have contrived to cover about fifteen yards this way, and how long he took about it he could not have told for the ransom of a king, when he came upon just such a water hole as he remembered. It stank, and was probably rather worse than poison, but Bob sucked it up like nectar. He got both hands in it and dabbed in his neckerchief, so as to wet his head and arms and breast and let the skin drink, too. But it thickened up like soup, and he was obliged to desist before reaching any point of positive relief.

So after a few moments' rest he began

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to move again, and was cheered to find at extraordinary intervals a patch of firmer ground like the queer stepping stones along which the Walts had led him to the heart of the morass. More than once, however, he broke right through the sod, and was sinking in the bog when he just managed to save himself by throwing wide his arms and legs, and lying motionless until he could get his breath and brace his nerves for the one effort, and one only, which might yield him something at which to catch hold, or sink him down for good.

Twice, three times, this happened, and when he dragged himself to safety with the few remaining willows which had survived thus much of his hopeless journey, Bob felt he was at the end of his tether. For nothing could he risk the suction of the keg again.

He felt he had been travelling for miles, and indeed he had travelled some considerable distance—but no hope sprang from the discovery that it had been feasible, so far, to move.

The swamp stretched away illimitably far on every hand. He must surely die or suffocate before he might reach the river or

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the forest. He could tell the time, perhaps, by the height of the sun, but he was very hazy as to his directions. No living thing could hold a straight course in the keg.

Bob raised himself upon his side—the ground was firm just there, and his hand came down on a little knot of grass. With a whirr of startled wings, a bird flew up, and he descried a nest of eggs. Five brown speckled eggs. They were bad, and tasted like sulphuretted hydrogen, extra, extra strong, but he got outside the lot, and fought down the deadly nausea. . . .

After that, he slept. Slept the sleep of strain and utter exhaustion.

The sun was in the western heavens when he woke. Was there ever such a nightmare awaking?

His thirst tormented him again . . . and once more he edged upon his stomach over the shaking bog.

He had been going fairly easily for as much as a dozen yards, astonished to find so broad a tract of firm ground, when of all extraordinary things he came upon a kedge, a little rusty anchor, one flute fixed firmly in the soil and a rope attached to its cam.

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Bob ventured to get upon his knees—his feet—and looked curiously about him. There was walking space just here, and a few steps farther on he discovered a second anchor attached to another serviceable-looking rope. He traced the rope—both ropes—and found they converged towards a point where both cut into the softer ground and disappeared from sight. The herbage here was cut and trampled as if it had been much disturbed . . . and the swamp oozed up again like an evil sea around an island.

The boy was far from guessing at the moment what it meant.

But he got his fingers upon one of the ropes, and tried the effect of a haul. His hands slipped on the slimy strands and the weight—whatever it was, suspended, anchored in the bog, resisted all his strength.

The boy was weak and quakey, and unable to get a purchase in his moccasins. He stripped them from his feet and tried a second time. But nothing could be made to budge, and he moved off towards the second cable. Perhaps the load at the end of it was suspended in less sticky slime, or was considerably smaller or lighter than the other, for it certainly

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yielded, and inch by inch Bob hauled the cable in.

Something round and black broke the surface of the mud, something like a porpoise with a ring in the middle of its back. Then Bob tumbled to it !

A barrel—a little eight-gallon barrel, with a bung in it as tight as could be driven.

He dragged the thing out of the slime and rolled it on the dryer grass. Liquid surged and splashed inside.

The whisky ! John and Black Walt's hiding-place in the middle of the keg.

He had hit upon the smugglers' unimaginable cache !

And, to be sure, a battered tin funnel lay a stone's throw away.

So this was whence they came as soon as daylight broke, stealing to the river along the secret trail ! This was their impenetrable "dump." It was indeed safe enough, for no one would ever risk his neck to seek it there ; no one would ever dream barrels of whisky could be hauled across the keg and sunk in its black depths. The thing was beyond a white man's cunning ; beyond the craft of any but an Indian.

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The momentary wild elation of his discovery gave place in Bob to the lowest depths of despair he had yet reached.

The half-breeds would not have cast him away in the swamp, and run the risk of his coming across this place, if it had been readily accessible to any but themselves. The chances of desperation had led him hither ; there were no chances of his escape.

Bob worked and fidgeted at the bung, beating the heel of his worn hand upon it, tried to draw it out with his teeth. Oh, for a good knife ! It yielded after intermittent efforts kept up for hour after hour and the golden liquor spouted out. Bob caught up the funnel, stopped the pipe with his finger and filled it to the brim.

He drank—drank as a man drinks whose tissues are played out. It might have been a cup of water. He filled another, tried to drink again, and rolled senseless on the sod.

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CHAPTER XII.

THE KAHGAHGEES, THE RAVENS, TO THE RESCUE.

A hundred years later—Bob woke up! Something drummed in his head; things, faces, eyes, danced before his face; something—fists, or even sticks, drummed about his shoulders. Red-hot blood consumed his cheeks; lightning darted in his brain; all his limbs were useless logs and all his joints were rusty.

Someone emptied water over him; someone stuffed cotton wool into his mouth; but it went down, and he got some more. . . .

Ages still, after that, he seemed to come to himself. And the kids were there: Wally, Alec, Sam, Tom and Harry Hembroff—the whole of the Patrol, as planned by himself and the chief, in remote ages past.

They thumped him yet and called his

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name, and were begging him to get a hunch on or the light would fail before they might hope to make the river. They gave him food and drink (for this was the third day since his disappearance, and displayed a queer thing like an enormous tea-tray woven of green withies, on which they wanted him to lie.

He did as he was bidden, inert and stupid still, but his senses gradually cleared. Long before they reached the spot where the Walts had abandoned him, he realised what these boys had done, and were yet attempting to do, to get him back to the river.

They had instantly grasped the fact that the half-breeds came from the keg when the canoe shot down upon them by the reeds opposite the Much-I-Do, and as Wally told him afterwards, that revealed two things: that the swamp itself was fordable, and that the whisky found a lodging place in it.

Where Black and John could go, where Black and John could convey a captive, *i.e.*, where three men might tread, boys like the Opechees might follow!

Walter and his companions had not risked the rapids, but had steered the canoe inshore that morning, where the forest above the

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creek came down to the water's edge. From there they made their way back to the settlement and went straight with their tale to the chief man in the place, to Peter Marchant.

Thereupon the factor acted.

He piled restoratives and food and stuff in a canoe, and sent two good fellows, Michael Dean and Louis Minister, to convoy Wally and the boys up river. Their instructions were to turn the canoe into the swamp at the spot where John and Black had emerged, and follow up that watery trail as far as it might lead. After that the boys alone were to essay to go on. If lightweights sank as they failed to find the treacherous path, such as evidently existed, it would be hopeless for the trappers to attempt it.

Wally had been provided with every necessary for the perilous undertaking—bill-hooks, mats, staves—and put in command of the expedition over the keg. And Bob—as his valiant patrol leader told the story—sensed the cleverness and resource of the boy, in addition to his valour and his loyalty.

For two days the Opechees had been hopping about the keg, retreating to the canoe

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at intervals for rest and food, but staking every foothold that they found, and ever going on. Bit by bit they worked out the baffling course until they came to the place where Bob had been abandoned. After that the problem was an easy one. They had but to pick up the trail of his dragging crawl across the swamp. He had travelled more than half a mile.

They thought he was dead when they discovered him, but their castaway scout-master was really drunk and senseless. Probably the whisky saved his life, and the barrel had all drained away. A queer reek rose from the mud.

Wally had cut through the farther cable before they left the whisky hold, and secured the smaller anchor. Bob was alive by this time to the significance of the boy's forethought, and demanded whether he and the rest had searched the place all over.

"Sure thing," they chimed, "but them two barrels seemed to be all that was left. The half-breeds were planning another run, but seems as though the sergeant, he's got on to it. They won't do no more dumping in the keg."

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From the point where Bob had been abandoned, the trail to the swamp-lead had now been staked, so he discarded the raft the boys had hauled along, and decided once more to trust to luck and the nimbleness which had come to him with rescue and success.

The whole patrol regained the canoe in safety, bearing with them the evidences of their find, together with their battered leader, very hollow-eyed and rakish-looking, after the first and last drink of his life.

Michael and Louis hauled the lot aboard, and lost no time setting a course back to the village. It looked as though the whisky running had been scotched by this adventure of the new-come English lad, and all that remained was to lay the two Walts by the heels.

The tale, when Bob and the boys got back, was told right there in the store, with all Arrow Creek crowded in to hear. Peter Marchant voiced the feeling of the trappers when he clapped a cordial hand upon Quested's back and said he was about the best thing had blown in upon the river for quite a while, and that they were glad to have him take the

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boys and girls in hand—if only he'd bring 'em up the way that he'd been raised.

If scoutin' was the ticket, Wally and Sam and them knew something worth knowin' on that head, as Quested had found out, but there was a lot more to it than finding ways about a keg, and he was to sail right in and put 'em wise to all the rest—the book learnin', too—and what it meant to stand for law and order. He'd got the boys at his back, and every one of them, right now.

It was awfully embarrassing to have them all pump-handle him the way they did, and to have half-a-dozen of the squaws clinging about his neck.

Bob was so far recovered as to protest loudly that no praise was due to him, but to the jolly fine material he had found in these boys and girls on the Creek. He had never struck anything remotely like it, and wouldn't he let 'em know at scout headquarters, both in Ottawa and London, what a troop he'd roped in on the Sakwasew !

He lost no time about it, either, but wrote a long letter to Ted Hunter, at Frensham, just as soon as he had drawn up his report for Sergeant Ivan. He put it, together with a

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long screeed to his mother, in his haversack, and made short work next morning of his preparations for a journey to the post. It was scarcely six weeks since he and the trooper had ridden into the settlement, and quite a number of things seemed to have been accomplished. Bob had no safer confidant for his private satisfaction than the pinto pony. He buckled up her girths this morning with a pardonable pride to think that he had become "some" rider by this time. Vaulting lightly to the saddle he rode up street, and drew rein for a parting word at Peter Marchant's store.

News, it seemed, had come in as to the missing Walts.

The agent had ridden over from the Reservation and was then being regaled with the story of their attempt to cast Quested away. He was a well-built man in early middle-life, with a head square-set as a box, and strong features to match. His stetson was pushed well to the back of his head, and his shirt, a stout, blue check affair, gaped at his neck. He was leaning on the counter with an elbow propped upon it, while he thoughtfully carressed his chin as Bob came in, then turned at

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Marchant's word, and straightened up and gave him greeting.

"You've done an excellent piece of work, young man," he said, "and may consider yourself lucky to have come well out of it. Depend upon it, John and Black Walt reckoned upon your death."

"Sure thing," the bystanders agreed, "and ain't likely to show up here awhile in consequence. They'll get clean away up-river to the north."

"That's what I've got to tell you," put in the agent, addressing himself to the factor and the scoutmaster exclusively; "they was heading north, by all accounts, three days ago, and it'll take the police some time to go after 'em and fetch 'em out. There's roving bands of non-treaty Indians beyond the White Pines Point, and if once they catch up with one of those the job will be ten times as stiff. You don't want to lose no time getting word to Ivan."

"I'm off," said Bob, "right now. Is Walter ready?"

For the patrol leader of the Opechees on a dandy little horse called Minnie, had announced his intention of accompanying the

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chief. A whoop of greeting from outside sufficiently answered Bob's inquiry, and Walter came loping up, surrounded by the troop.

The boys and girls gave the pair of them a rousing send-off from the village, their shrill cheers ringing through the forest as the horsemen hit the trail and disappeared adown its dim, mysterious aisles.

All day they rode, camping for a spell to rest the horses where the stony foothills gave upon the levels of the prairie, and bivouacking for the night on the open plains when twilight fell. Wally Marchant built a fire, and after supper, when they lay beside it, yarning, called Bob's attention to a pair of green eyes fixed upon them from the darkness in the rear. Quested's hand reached for the factor's rifle, but the boy laughed, and, seizing a blazing brand, flung it in the direction of that stealthy and maleficent stare. With a yelp like a dog's, the coyote turned tail and fled. He was the meanest beast, quoth Wally, only sneaking round to steal. The least scrap of fire would suffice to drive him off, and that there smudge, if they banked it up good and firm, would last till morning. They could sleep without setting a watch.

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Next day they traversed the interminable plain over which Bob had ridden with the sergeant six weeks earlier, and kept the saddle long after sundown in the hope of making Fairbanks's ranch before dark.

They were received by Phil and Uly with the jubilation that always attends an unexpected but welcome guest dropping in upon the prairie. The former's leg was well on the mend by now, and he could get about with the aid of Coureur a good deal better out of doors than in the house with a crutch.

Nothing could exceed the interest displayed by both the homesteaders in Bob's account of the discovery of the whisky dump up on Arrow Creek, and Phil declared he was "mighty glad" over and over again, "to have been that bright, the day his hired man turned up, as to have shoved him on to Ivan."

Walter Marchant, rendering good account of himself at their rough but well-spread board, volunteered most of the rest of the tale despite Bob's efforts to shut him up. He was out to see that Queenie missed nothing of the credit due to her over that bluff the Opechees had called; but when he went on

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to tell about the fire—drawing, Bob protested, an awfully long bow—and the others shouted the objection down, plying the boy's plate with heaping beans, Quested got up with a laugh, and cleared off on the plea of going to the stables.

They "stopped over," too, at Mike's, on the trail to Findlay in the morning, and found that cheery redoubtable frisking, amid clouds of dust, on the far-flung patch of ploughing he had "broken" in the spring. Mike reined up his team as the scouts galloped over the hill, and praised the saints with Irish cordiality at recognising Bob.

"Sure!" he cried, "it's a great gossoon ye are! And ye've been doing the sergeant's work for him, and all——" When the tale had to bear a second brief recounting. From Mike's to Findlay, *via* the precipitous coulee, took scarcely another hour's ride, and the two scouts fetched up at the hotel for their midday meal. It might have been exactly the same meal that Bob had eaten there six weeks before, as far as any improvement went in the toughness of the viands set before them. But to Wally Marchant, if not to his superior, this experience smacked of the great

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outside world, and he enjoyed "hitting town" with all the gusto of a child of the backwoods. To Wally, this was splendour and the great "outside." All was hustle and business and excitement in his eyes, especially over at the depot when the train went through, and most of the inhabitants of the place drifted thitherwards in the hope of news or the sight of an arrival.

Just to finish out the hour while the horses rested they had a look round "town" after dinner, paying a visit to the post office, where half-a-dozen welcome letters for Bob had been lying for days in a pigeon-hole, awaiting chance transportation to the Creek.

He came out upon the sidewalk with them in his hand, a far-away look in his eyes, and turned a dollar over to Wally for candy and suchlike at the store, while he squatted on a bench beside the Hardware, and gave himself up—for the first time in six weeks—to themes and thoughts exclusively his own.

Young Walter had a gorgeous time ruffling it in scout get-up before the Finlay chaps. They foregathered in the lumber yard and swapped a deal of information on both sides. Wally was not behindhand with the Saga of

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the Creek, and the sophisticated urchins of this prairie town "allowed" that scouting seemed "some" stunt. Couldn't that feller—what d'you call him? Quested?—round them up into a bunch and give *them* gorgeous things to do?

Wally was, then and there, for rounding up the scoutmaster and propounding this development, but Bob said they'd better stick to the job in hand just now, and push on to the post. He'd look into the thing another time and see if they couldn't start a troop in Findla. They had twenty miles yet to go before they reached their journey's end.

Stiff and tired, they rode up to the barracks by the end of their third day. Sergeant Ivan's headquarters was at a place called Colter (named after a famous trapper of the far north-west), about ten times the size of Findlay, but otherwise considerably like it. Everywhere were the same frame houses to be seen, the wooden sidewalks and the rutted, unmetalled roads. At the barracks they had a couple of cells for prisoners, and Spartan-like accommodation for the troopers. In a country where seven hundred of these men patrol an area as big as Siberia, it is not

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supposed that many of them are often to be found at home. The sergeant was there and a single trooper; one of the others had been absent for two years and might be expected to come in one day, not empty handed, but with no more of a report than simply that his orders had been carried out.

Sergeant Ivan betrayed satisfaction, but no particular surprise, when Bob strode into his small office and saluted.

In two words their business was dispatched, and the sole available man, Constable Arthur Marks, was off and riding from the post with a warrant for the capture of the Walts.

It would take a long time to tell the tale of that pursuit, especially as the trooper would have been, himself, the last to put it into more than a dozen words. Such is the tradition, the discipline, and the pride of the force—to go and *do* tremendous things, often single handed, and at tremendous odds, and say not one superfluous word about it.

When the leader of an heroic patrol died of starvation in the wilds, after covering two hundred miles of the trail at 18° below zero, on a dwindling ration of nothing but dog's

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meat, he wrote a will in a word or two, the longest and the last sentence in it being : " God bless all." He had left everything he possessed to his mother, writing with a piece of burnt twig on a torn scrap of paper discovered later on his dead and frozen body.

Constable Marks returned to Colter ten weeks later accompanied by his two prisoners, and Sergeant Ivan took them to the capital for trial. He had taken Bob's deposition, corroborated by the evidence of Walter Marchant, when the scouts brought word to the post, but it seemed that both witnesses would have to be produced, and the pair rode the trail again together ten weeks afterwards.

It was a dramatic moment for the scout-master when he faced John and Black Walt again, across the court house in the city. The last time he had seen those two dark and cruel faces was when they laughed at him and left him in the swamp. The charge against them now was a graver one than that of conveying forbidden liquor to the Indian Reservation. They were indicted for attempted murder.

The story of Bob's rescue by the Opechees made a great sensation in court, and the headlines in the papers screamed praises of the

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scouts through all the capital. The pair of them were overwhelmed by the welcome and hospitality extended by the three scout troops already established there, and Wally Marchant, who had never been in a town of any size before, was like to have his head completely turned. They went everywhere and saw everything, and found themselves the guests of everybody whom time permitted that they should honour with their company.

The day sentence was pronounced—and the Walts were committed to the State Penitentiary for a long term of years—the scouts of the capital organised a jamboree in the grounds of the great experimental farm beyond North End, and presented Scoutmaster Qusted with a purse of seven hundred dollars for his troop funds, yelling for a “speech” in return.

Bob, as red as a beetroot, said speechifying wasn't in his line, but on behalf of Arrow Creek he had all sorts of thanks to offer for the purse and this jolly comradeship and backing. It was a topping thing to find scouts wherever you went, like this, and he hoped if any of them should go one day to England, they'd realise what he was feeling then—

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that for every brother you left behind there was one waiting for you on the other side.

A roar went up when Bob subsided, only to jump to his feet again with an urgent after-thought.

"If any of you chaps," he said, "are camping pretty far afield this year, don't forget the Creek. We'd be tickled to death to have you. And—and——" he went burning red again, and laughed, "if you could persuade a bunch of guides to come along and give our girls a boost, it would be as big a help as your seven hundred dollars."

There was enormous laughter over this, and a number of scoutmasters, pressing about the Englisher, debated that weird notion of "mixed patrols" with much amusement. Miss Sadie, they imagined, must be some sport, and rallied Bob, with hefty cloutings on the back, for enrolling her, together with his troop. Sure, they promised, the guides should come along. They'd hit up the pace upon the Creek that summer.

And indeed they did !

But long before the "vacation" month of August, when these promises were redeemed, something more delightful still happened.

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Mrs. Quested wrote and asked her son if he would like to have her join him. If, as he told her, the little log-house upon the Sakwasew was henceforth to be his home, should she not come out and keep his house for him? What was good enough for her boy was amply good enough for her; she was just longing to come.

Bob got a letter down to Findlay in response to that by two scouts of the Mishe Mokwas, who volunteered as pony express riders and did the round trip in six days.

They brought more letters back. . . .

The Head wrote from Frensham that the troop there had heard from Sergeant Ivan.

The tale of Bob's exploit in the river when the forest fire came down, had gone up to headquarters in London, and Scoutmaster Robert Quested was herewith informed that he had been awarded the decoration of the Silver Wolf.

THE END.

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